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B R I T A I N  
AND THE  
MEDITERRANEAN

BY  
KENNETH WILLIAMS

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
MAJOR W. E. SIMNETT

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## FOREWORD

As Mr. Kenneth Williams points out in this book, British territories and commitments in the Mediterranean, though important in themselves, cannot be adequately understood in isolation. They form an integral part of our Imperial interests as a whole, and having first described Britain's Mediterranean colonies and mandated territories, Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, Palestine, and Transjordan, Mr. Williams provides an admirably clear picture of the background or setting against which these countries have to be considered, and their significance in Empire policy. For this task he is abundantly qualified, for as editor (until the war) of *Great Britain and the East*, whose scope covers British interests in the Mediterranean and in many adjoining lands, he was constantly studying conditions and problems in that somewhat complex and fascinating quarter of the world and was able to see them in their true perspective. Having myself a different though allied task, I have derived very much profit from reading this book, and though familiar with

the state of literature on Mediterranean strategy and politics which the international situation has called forth, I believe that the general reader will nowhere find a clearer and more straightforward presentation of the essential elements of the Mediterranean scene from a British angle than in the following pages.

But it should be remembered that the Mediterranean colonies, whilst significant factors in Imperial strategy, are themselves part of a larger entity, namely, the Colonial Empire, which is too little known to the British public, though they bear the ultimate responsibility for it. That Empire, distinct from the Dominions and India, comprises over forty territories, large and small, scattered across the globe, covering an area of over two million square miles (three million, if the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan be included) and containing a population, white, black, brown, and yellow, of sixty million people, or more than double that of all the Dominions (excluding India) put together. For the good government and future welfare of this great heritage, the voters of this country are responsible. We now hold it in trust for its peoples, whose eventual goal, whether near or distant, must be the greatest

measure of self-government of which they may prove capable. That is why all talk of "handing over" colonies to other Powers, as if they were disposable property, is irrelevant. They can only be handed over to their own people.

It is hoped, in future volumes of this series, to describe the other divisions of the Colonial Empire, in the West Indies, in West, East, and Central Africa, in Ceylon, Malaya, and the East, and the scattered islands from Fiji to the Falklands. In this Mediterranean group, strategic and political considerations have bulked rather largely, but that is because England is in the Mediterranean primarily for strategic rather than for colonial reasons. These considerations will not be so prominent in the other groups.

For nine years past, it has been my daily task to study the British Colonial Empire as a whole. It is a very fascinating study. I cannot of course help forming my own views upon many of its problems. For example, I think we should now begin to reintroduce progressively self-government into Cyprus; not to do so would be to falsify our declared colonial policy. And whatever the advantages of Alexandria or other Mediterranean harbours, and however



friendly the countries in which they are situated, only Cyprus is indubitably British territory, and for that and other reasons should be developed to the full.

Palestine seems as intractable as Ireland used to be, but I think there will be no permanent solution that does not envisage an Arab federation embracing all Syria and neighbouring Arab lands, with autonomy for the Jewish National Home as an integral part of that larger federation. But to discuss all this would take too long, and I can best conclude by counselling the reader to study Mr. Williams' intensely interesting survey, and, equipped with the knowledge which this will give him, to form his own judgments.

W. E. SIMNETT.

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
	FOREWORD . . . . .	V
	PROLOGUE . . . . .	I

### PART I

I.	GIBRALTAR . . . . .	9
II.	MALTA . . . . .	22
III.	CYPRUS . . . . .	40
IV.	PALESTINE . . . . .	60
V.	TRANS-JORDAN . . . . .	87

### PART II

VI.	BRITISH TRADE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN . . . . .	99
VII.	STAY OR RUN ? . . . . .	103
VIII.	STRATEGIC ISLANDS . . . . .	108
IX.	NORTHERN AFRICA . . . . .	115
X.	BRITISH INTERESTS . . . . .	120
XI.	BASE OF THE BRITISH FLEET . . . . .	126

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. STRATEGY OF THE MEDITER- RANEAN . . . .	129
XIII. THE MIDDLE EAST "STRATEGIC RESERVE" . . . .	133
XIV. THE ANGLO-TURKISH AGREE- MENT . . . .	136
XV. GERMANY'S INTERESTS . . . .	140
XVI. FRANCE AND ITALY . . . .	144
XVII. THE ISLAMIC FRINGE . . . .	149
XVIII. IMPORTANCE OF A PEACEFUL PALESTINE. . . .	153
XIX. THE SUEZ CANAL . . . .	158
XX. SUMMING UP . . . .	163

## MAPS

GIBRALTAR . . . . .	15
MALTA . . . . .	31
THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. . . .	134
THE SUEZ CANAL . . . . .	159

TERRITORIES AND MILITARY ROUTES

*Endpapers*

## PROLOGUE

IT is the purpose of this book to give a brief account of why a northern people, the British, are in the Mediterranean, to consider in some detail why and how they have become responsible for three colonies in that tideless sea, Gibraltar, Malta, and Cyprus, and also for the mandated territories of Palestine and Trans-Jordan, and how their interests would be defended if threatened in time of war.

The greater part of the British Empire, it has been said, was built up in a fit of absence of mind. True it is that the British have never been guilty of—or have never been able to boast—that logical design in their expansionist movements of which Continental observers generally accuse them; but in respect of the Mediterranean at least their course has followed some logical outlines.

The presence of Britain in the Mediterranean is to be explained by her anterior interests, not in the southern shores of that sea, namely, Africa, but in her interests in Asia, and, above all, in India. The East India Company was founded in 1600. In

those days trade went through the Mediterranean and overland across the countries which we now call the Middle East. When conditions for traders became too precarious in the Middle East, British vessels carried goods from and to India and beyond by the Cape route. To a large extent the Mediterranean interest in its bearing upon our Indian Empire became minimised. But with the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869—a development opposed by the British government of the time—the Mediterranean route to and from the East was seen to be more than ever vital.

Now two of the colonies with which the following pages deal were acquired before the construction of the Suez Canal. Gibraltar was taken in 1704 and Malta in 1800. The acquisition of Cyprus in 1878 was not directly connected with the Suez Canal route, but the conquest of Palestine from the Ottoman Turks during the Great War 1914–1918 was impelled directly by considerations for the safety of the Suez Canal. To-day the future of the three colonies and of the mandated territories is to be interpreted very considerably from the angle of their bearing upon our Imperial trade route through the Mediterranean, a route which is a most important,

if not a vital, artery in the blood-stream of the British Empire. Should this route be lost to Britain, the Empire admittedly would not at once fall ; not a few critics, indeed, have envisaged its temporary abandonment without undue apprehension ; but if the British Empire were not able in times of peace to trade as she liked in this Middle Sea, it assuredly would resemble little the Empire that we know to-day. It is recognition of this fact that has impelled British statesmen recently to declare that our interests in the Mediterranean would be defended, and not merely left over to be picked up again at the end of any conceivable European conflict.

I have said that there was some logic in the development of British interests in the Mediterranean. Take Gibraltar, captured from the Spaniards in the reign of Queen Anne. Cromwell, who revived the foreign policy of the Elizabethans, wanted Gibraltar : so did William III. As with Aden, at the southern end of the Red Sea, naval opinion saw the advantages of Gibraltar long before the opportunity came to annex it during the war of the Spanish Succession : the ghosts of the Admirals of Cromwell, in particular, must have applauded the chance that was denied to them in their lifetime.

Again, take Malta. That the British should have this island, if the plans of Napoleon in Africa and Asia were to be nullified, was essential. Taken it was, and so quickly were its advantages realised that it has since been the headquarters of the Mediterranean Fleet.

Not so easily into the postulate of a logical design can Cyprus be fitted. Cyprus for years was the Cinderella of British overseas possessions, and its strategic possibilities, in particular, have never been fully utilised. It seems, however, that an island which was required for reasons that no longer obtain, may, by force of circumstances, take its place in the British scheme of Mediterranean strategy.

These three colonies are British possessions, and seem likely to remain so. The mandated territories of Palestine and Trans-Jordan, however, are in a different category. By definition a mandated territory, especially one belonging to the class known as "A" mandates (the classes "B" and "C" apply to more primitive communities, obviously some distance yet from ability to govern themselves), presupposes an end to the mandatory régime. Yet whatever the future of Palestine it will certainly continue

to be linked up by very close ties with the British Empire.

The student of the places which are dealt with in the following pages is very apt to treat them as isolated problems. He may frequently wonder, for instance, what the question of self-government in Cyprus or in Malta has to do with larger issues, or how the Arab-Zionist matter can radically affect Imperial interests. The truth is, however, that all such questions are not merely local, nor even merely of Mediterranean significance, but have, in the last analysis, a vital bearing on the framework of the Empire itself, which, as already indicated, is to-day in the Mediterranean primarily because of tremendous interest outside that sea.





## ***PART I***



## CHAPTER I

### GIBRALTAR

MANY are the words which we owe to the Arabs, who once were looked upon by the ordinary Englishman as little more than Vandals that threatened to overrun Christendom, but whose services to the cause of civilisation are now more widely recognised. "Admiral" comes from the Arabic ; so do "algebra," "alchemy," "divan," "muslin," "cable," "magazine," "traffic," and many another word in common use to-day. So does Gibraltar.

Gibraltar was known to the Romans as one of the Pillars of Hercules, Calpe by name, the other being Abyla, on the opposite side of the Straits. But its value as a fortress commanding entrance into the Mediterranean was not perceived until the eighth century, when in the year 711, a Persian, Tarik-Ibn-Zeid, with some 8,000 Berbers (Moslems from North Africa) conquered it in the name of the Arabs. From this man the Rock, as it is known to-day, derives its name, for it was called after him Jebel Tarik,

the Mountain of Tarik, which the British have corrupted into and crystallised as Gibraltar.

With the history of Gibraltar for the thousand years following its capture by the Moslems we are not here concerned, except to note that its advantages as a commanding fortress were well recognised by any Powers, Christian or Moslem, who exercised influence, or wished to exercise influence, in the Mediterranean. Yet it should not be supposed that the British walked into Gibraltar as easily as one picks a ripe pear from a tree. The defeat of the Armada did not at once end the naval might of Spain, but it did inaugurate a long process of decay. Of this decay the British, under the impetus of Cromwell, and the French, under Louis XIV, were not slow to take advantage. For twenty years in the second half of the seventeenth century, for example, the British held (1662-1683) Tangier, on the Moroccan coast opposite Gibraltar, and little power of divination was needed to predicate that those same British, notwithstanding the fact that Tangier had fallen to them, not as a result of fighting, but as part of a dowry, would attempt to wrest Gibraltar from the declining Spaniards.

That chance came in 1704. The defences of the fortress had been neglected by the now dismayed and slothful Spaniards, and they surrendered after but three days' resistance to an Anglo-Dutch force under the command of Sir George Rooke and the Prince of Hesse-Darmstadt. The casualties on this allied side amounted to 60 killed and 216 wounded. Actually, this force was acting for an Austrian competitor for the Spanish throne, the Archduke Charles, and possession was taken in his, not in the British name. But Sir George Rooke, well aware of the value of the fortress to his country, adjusted this little difficulty and proclaimed occupation of Gibraltar in the name of his Queen, Anne. The "man on the spot" had greater powers then than he has now, when everything of major importance has to be referred home. International dovescotes were ruffled by this pretension, but the Rock was finally awarded to Great Britain, visibly on the upgrade, by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

Popular opinion in England, accustomed now to the phrase "as safe as Gib." or "as safe as the Rock," did not at first realise the importance of Gibraltar. Even the politicians, not yet under the influence of the slogan "what we have we hold," were for

some sixty years after its capture willing to barter it for advantages elsewhere, and in this galley of men who could immediately see so little in the significance of Gibraltar to England we find even the elder Pitt.

No wonder, therefore, that in the early years of its British connection, little trouble was taken over Gibraltar. Our Mediterranean Fleet, finding it so badly fortified and equipped with such inadequate docking facilities, actually had to return home for the winter! It was in fact partly because Gibraltar appeared to have so little to offer to our Fleet, though also because a better point was wanted for watching the activities of the French Fleet, based on Toulon, that, four years later, the island of Minorca, with its landlocked harbour of Port Mahon, was acquired. This Balearic island was held until 1756, when Admiral Byng was held to have lost it through cowardice; it was, however, restored to England by the French in the Treaty of Paris, 1763.

Not for over seventy years after its capture was very much done by the British for Gibraltar, and the Spaniards, who resented its detachment, naturally never lost hope of getting it back. In the nick of time, in 1777, the London Government appointed a highly

intelligent Governor, who imperatively demanded, and was granted, better fortifications, reserves of food, and a reinforced garrison. I say "in the nick of time," for only two years later was to occur one of the greatest events in the history of British Gibraltar—the four years' siege by a combined French and Spanish force. Most gallantly did this Governor, General Eliott (afterwards Lord Heathfield), hold out. The most critical moments occurred in September, 1782, when the Rock was violently bombarded for five days. Eliott, however, gave back shot for shot, completely dismaying his attackers. Relief came shortly afterwards when Admiral Howe sailed into Gibraltar—a great achievement of a great sailor.

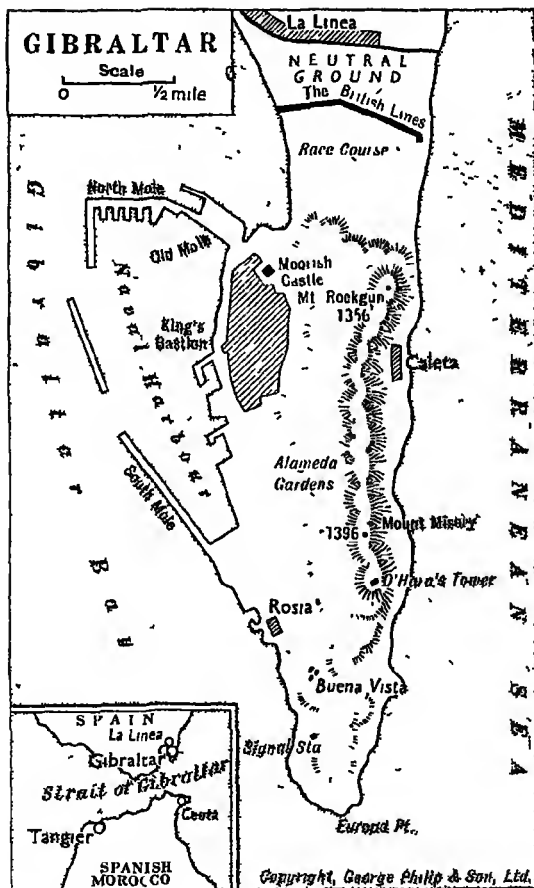
From that day, October 19, 1782, Gibraltar has never looked back. It became enshrined not only in the emotions of the British people, but also in their minds. It signified British tenacity on the seas and the resolve to keep open, if not to control, essential trade routes. It grew not only into an incomparable fortress, but also into a naval base, and never again did any responsible Englishman contemplate ceding it, unless, indeed, it were in exchange for what its critics considered an even more valuable



acquisition on the other side of the Straits. Into the respective merits of Gibraltar and Ceuta ( $15\frac{1}{4}$  miles across the Straits), however, I cannot enter here : it is a matter over which experts have wrangled for at least forty years. Suffice it to say now that the chance of exchanging it appears to have gone by, and that the present decision is to hold on to Gibraltar.

Of all the separately administered dependencies of Great Britain, Gibraltar is the smallest. Its area is only  $1\frac{7}{8}$  square miles. On the west of the promontory, which is 3 miles in length, with an average breadth of  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile, is the Bay of Gibraltar, and on the east is the Mediterranean. The Rock, the highest point of which is over 1,400 feet, is almost inaccessible on its northern and eastern sides ; very steep also is its southern side. The town itself lies on the western side, where there is a gradual slope ; this is divided by the Alameda public gardens into the North Town and the South Town, the former containing the greater number of buildings.

To the mainland of Spain Gibraltar is joined by a sandy isthmus, some ten feet above sea level. On this isthmus is situated the playground of the garrison and residents ; here are a race-course, a cricket-ground, an



GIBRALTAR

esplanade along the eastern beach, rifle-butts, cemeteries and slaughter-houses, and wells from which water is obtained for sanitary purposes. Rain-water tanks provide the houses with drinking-water.

As with Malta, the Governor of Gibraltar is always chosen from the ranks of distinguished Generals, and in this Governor is vested all legislative and executive power.

Gibraltar is a healthy station, though before modern hygienic methods were introduced disease and death were not infrequent. Its climate is sub-tropical, and the summer heat, burdened with a damp, heavy wind from the east known as the "Levanter," can be very trying, especially in the low-lying town.

The population is mixed. For reasons that need not be gone into here, most of the Spaniards left Gibraltar after its capture by the British. Their place was taken largely by Genoese, who were invited to settle. Like the Spaniards, these settlers are Roman Catholic in religion. But there are also a number of Jews and Maltese in Gibraltar, whose normal population is something under 20,000, of whom perhaps a quarter are Spanish subjects.

Generally speaking, the people of Gibraltar

are contented. The leading families are extremely loyal to the British connection, and the material interests of the bulk of the population keep them on the British side. There is in Gibraltar itself no echo of the cry heard on the mainland of its being returned to Spain.

The trade of Gibraltar is purely a transit trade, for it has no products of its own on which to depend. But it is solvent: it has no Public Debt. Its revenue is derived chiefly from Port dues, Crown rents, and duties on tobacco and alcohol.

One of the features of Gibraltar consists of the remarkable tunnelling of its cliffs. This tunnelling was begun at the time of the great siege, already mentioned, and its uses at a time when almost every country in Europe is thinking of Air Raid Precautions need no emphasis. Much has already been done to improve these caves with the possibility of bombing in mind. Ten specially chosen caverns, each to contain 1,000 to 1,500 civilians, have been fitted with electric light, drinking-water, benches, first-aid stations, and gas-proof curtains, and to each cavern there are half a dozen entrances.

In other than passive means of defence there has been terrific activity during this

year. General Sir Charles Harington, who was Governor of Gibraltar from 1932 to 1938, has publicly declared that so long ago as 1936 he had asked for gas-masks, to be told that he could expect none before 1939. He has also declared that at the time of the crisis in September, 1938, Gibraltar found itself totally unprepared: it had, in fact, only four anti-aircraft guns, two at each end of the rock.

But the successor of General Sir Charles Harington, General Sir Edmund Ironside, made Chief of the General Staff in September, 1939, was more fortunate. Under his ægis the whole Colony was transformed. Immense reserves of guns and ammunition have been stored, and, too, at least a six months' food supply. Day and night the preparations against a siege have been going on, and the Gibraltarians are certainly as well aware as any people in the world what a war might mean to them.

This brings us to the strategic importance of Gibraltar. What is its worth to the British Empire to-day? It is easy, of course, to see that it is one of the gateways of the Mediterranean, but there is such a thing as "gate-crashing." Gibraltar in the possession of the British did not suffice to prevent

hostile submarines slipping into and out of the Middle Sea during the Great War. And how would it fare if under the threat of artillery bombardment from either land or sea or of bombardment from the air? What would be its lot if attacked from land?—and to suppose that Spaniards have relinquished for all time hope of its being restored to Spain is no easy thing.

These are questions to which there can be no dogmatic answer. It is generally agreed that the Gibraltar garrison could prevent the capture of the Rock, but whether, if subjected to constant aerial attack, it could guarantee its continuance as a naval base, is arguable. Several naval and military critics assert that it could not, and against them the layman can only advance the opinion of other experts, not his own. The problem is set out at some length in Mr. G. T. Garratt's book (published April, 1939), *Gibraltar and the Mediterranean*. It is, however, appropriate to reiterate that since the issue of that book the British government has busily occupied itself with Gibraltar, and manifestly is not allowing preconceived theories to annul in advance of conflict the value of this fortress which has been proved, if in different circumstances from those with which Great

Britain might conceivably be faced, not once, but scores of times. There is no plan to abandon any of the vital points of the Imperial trade route, and certainly not the first to be encountered as our ships travel eastwards from home.

Probably the most considerable factor to be taken into account when estimating the future of Gibraltar is the attitude of Spain. Will the Spanish government, when the mainland is consolidated, peremptorily demand the cession of Gibraltar? Would Spanish forces, in the event of a world war, attack the fortress from the land? A few years ago a phrase depicting the Spanish view was given much currency—"Gibraltar is a name that cracks like a whip, that brings a blush to our faces."

But a Spanish attack on Gibraltar would have to come from outside, for there is no irredentist feeling within the Rock itself. Far different would it be if Great Britain were in possession of Ceuta instead of Gibraltar, for there are some 20,000 Spanish Nationalists—a point sometimes overlooked by those who have advocated the change.

Imponderables cannot be weighed. In any European war we should hope for at least the neutrality of Spain, whatever

attempts were made to convert neutrality into belligerency. And though Gibraltar may never again be to Britain what it has been in the past, its symbolic significance is something that can be lightly yielded by no British government.



## CHAPTER II

### MALTA

UNLIKE Gibraltar, Malta teems with historical romance, for it has been coveted by all those who wanted to be masters of the Mediterranean even if they were not specifically concerned with what happened outside the waters of the Inland Sea. Lying between the two continents of Europe and Africa, and not impossibly far—even in the early days of sail—from the Syrian coast of Asia—it became an apple of the eye to all strong or warlike races. Even in ancient times it reached commercial greatness, though it was the Arabs, again, who first seemed to realise its potentialities as a fortress. These virile Moslems began a series of fortifications which subsequent Christian occupation improved. In the hands of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, for instance, Malta was in effect an outpost of Christendom against Islam, whose leadership was taken over from the Arabs by the Turks.

Centuries before the Christian era, Greeks

and Phoenicians, that is, Europeans and Asiatics, battled for possession of Malta. There followed the challenge of an African power, the Carthaginians. And then came the Roman occupation, during which (A.D. 62) the famous shipwreck of St. Paul at Malta occurred. To Rome—or rather Byzantium, for when the Roman Empire was divided into western and eastern sections, Malta fell to the eastern section—succeeded the Arabs, who in their turn were followed by various European overlords. And of nearly all these stages of occupation there remain traces in Malta to-day.

Not until near the end of the eighteenth century did the British appear upon the scene. A century and a half earlier an English Mediterranean squadron had been established by Cromwell, but this never found itself concerned with affairs at the eastern end of the sea. The schemes of Napoleon in Egypt and Syria, however, forced the British to extend their gaze. At the end of the eighteenth century Napoleon was threatening to close the Mediterranean to British commerce. He seized Malta, where, however, the French found themselves very unpopular, and landed in Egypt. Into the eastern Mediterranean the British fleet there-

fore sailed, and Nelson's victory of the Nile in 1798 had the most resounding repercussions. Sea-power was then in its hey-day, and the blockading of the French garrison of Malta by the British resulted in the island's changing hands. True, in the subsequent peace of Amiens, 1802, it was stipulated that Malta should be returned, not to the French but to the Knights of Malta, but the inhabitants themselves would not brook this. Malta therefore remained in British hands, and the change was confirmed by the Treaty of Paris in 1814.

Incidentally, these naval operations in the Mediterranean resulted in Great Britain's getting control of the Ionian Islands, which, however, were returned to Greece in 1863—a gesture which did Britain little strategical harm at the time and had the effect of earning the undying gratitude of Greece, who already owed much to the British for their share in helping the Greeks obtain their independence from the Turks.

The joy of the Maltese in coming under British rule was unfeigned, and their loyalty during the last hundred years or so has been constant and unstinted. It was no mere compounding with a Great Power—and the quick-witted Maltese perceived that England

was the rising power in the Mediterranean—but the feeling that with Britain they had a real identity of interests which prompted the Maltese so quickly to fall in with the transfer of sovereignty and of allegiance. Many and many a time the Maltese in subsequent years could have been useful to enemies of Great Britain—and to-day they are scattered all over the Mediterranean—but unswervingly they have remained loyal. To this gratifying subject I will return later, when considering how far the feelings of the local populations in Mediterranean territories under British influence should be taken into account. Here it is enough to say that if Britain has done well by Malta, certainly the Maltese have acted well towards Britain.

The British have a habit—how it originated I do not know—of calling a group of islands by the name of its principal component. Thus we speak of Zanzibar, and often forget the existence of the neighbouring Pemba; we speak of Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf, and neglect the fact that there is more than one island under that name. And similarly when we talk of Malta, we ought to remember that it consists not only of Malta proper, but also of the important island of Gozo, the less important island of

Comino, and the two uninhabited islands of Cominotto and Filfola. The whole group has an area of 117 square miles: that of Malta (17 miles long, 8 miles broad) is  $91\frac{1}{2}$  square miles, and that of Gozo  $24\frac{3}{4}$  square miles. Malta is therefore not quite two-thirds of the size of the Isle of Wight (145 square miles).

Malta is no unpopular station for the Services, and many a happy day has been spent by civilians there, especially in the winter months, when it is not too hot. But Nature itself, apart from the ever-present sun and the surrounding blue sea, has done little for the attractiveness of Malta. Both it and the neighbouring Gozo are rocky islands, with no hill higher than 1,200 feet to provide a sense of physical grandeur. Fruit-bearing trees are practically the only arborage, though the orange groves and the vineyards are pleasing enough to look upon. The fields, which incidentally, do not provide pasture for cows—the only locally produced milk is goats' milk—have to be protected by stone walls against the strong north-east wind, the *gregale* (the wind that wrecked St. Paul).

But the Maltese make the most of their barren land. Some 14,000 of them are en-

gaged in agriculture. They terrace the hill-sides, to conserve the winter rains, and they produce corn, potatoes, onions, cumin seeds, fruits, especially oranges and figs, and honey. Of livestock they raise goats, mules, and asses. It is a country of small proprietors, and they are quick to take advantage of improved husbandry methods and of modern marketing schemes.

Industrially, the Maltese are clever. Their lacemaking, particularly that of Gozo, is famous all over the world, and they take a natural pride in that the Queen herself has bought some of their beautiful lace. Genuine Maltese lace is a luxury, and the fact that it is not within the reach of everyone's pocket has led recently to the introduction of a cheap artificial silk thread in its manufacture.

Cotton, again, though not the flourishing industry it was formerly, is still considerably grown; it is usually planted as a "catch-crop" between seasons. Nelson was so taken with the quality of Maltese cotton that he had his entire fleet fitted in Valletta harbour with sailcloth made from it.

Among the small industries which have made some reputation outside the island may be mentioned buttons, which promise well in export, and beer and pipes. And,

naturally, fishing is the occupation of many people—probably as many as 2,000. The Maltese recently began to use the *lampara*—a device consisting of a strong light to attract shoals of fish to a circular net with a flat-bottomed layer and a fuse at the end. Inshore fishing is extensively practised, but motor boats are also used for venturing in further waters.

But the greatest employer is His Majesty's Dockyard. In normal times 7,000 Maltese are here employed, and excellent workmen they are, capable of intensive work. Several times in recent years they have been officially praised for their unsparing efforts.

There has been much argument upon the origin of the Maltese. A Semitic strain, deriving from the conquests of the Arabs, and conceivably of the much earlier Phœnician influence in the islands, is evident ; but an admixture of Italian or Sicilian blood is also manifest. But the high-born and the low-born Maltese are linked not only in their common allegiance to the British Empire, but also in their use of the Maltese language, a curious tongue which is predominantly Semitic. Over this question of language there have been stormy battles. For long, Italian was an official language, but to-day

English and Maltese are recognised as official tongues.

Very proud of their history and of their peculiarities are the Maltese : they can claim to be the smallest European nation which at once is racially distinct and has its own language. Their religion, the Roman Catholic religion, permeates their lives. They have marvellous processions, and celebrate all the days of the ecclesiastical calendar. They have no divorce : marriage, they say, is like a knot you tie with your tongue but cannot undo with your teeth—you tie the knot at the altar.

The way in which the inhabitants have preserved their old customs is indeed one of the joys of the visitor, for whom in so many parts of the Near East the picturesque is fast disappearing. The people on feast days present the gayest scene imaginable—particularly the women in the national headdress—the *ghonella*, a " hat " of black silk encircling the head on a whalebone stiffening and covering the back to below the knees. This headdress originated in the habit of hatless women throwing the skirt over the head when entering a church !

Culturally, the Maltese are an advanced people, despite the fact that literacy is not



high. They have a magnificent Royal Library, completed by the Knights of Malta in 1796, and now possessing 300,000 books and manuscripts. Many of the manuscripts have never been published, and the Library's collection of artistic bindings is said to be one of the richest in Europe. The island has, too, its own University, with six faculties, including Medicine, Law and Engineering. Education is pursued for its own sake, as anyone who has met Maltese students either in their own home or on a visit to England must soon realise. The Maltese are in the main cultural stream of Europe not, as frequently happens with Near Eastern students, for the sake of getting a "government job," or at least to be a "clerk" in some office, but because they have a genuine passion for learning.

Of Malta itself, Valletta (so called from the Grand Master La Vallette, who repulsed the Turks in 1565) is the capital. It is a fascinating city, not only on account of its grand harbour, one of the finest natural harbours in the world, which shelters ships from every wind except the north-east, but also because of its magnificent fortifications, rising sheer out of the water. Everywhere one is reminded of the Knights of Malta, who built



palaces and churches and public buildings. Its cathedral of St. John is one of the jewels of Christendom: but Malta is full of fine churches.

The old capital, too, Citta Vecchia, or Medina, some seven miles from Valletta, is a perfect example of a fortified town. But even if the visitor is insensible to architectural dignity, he is not likely to fail to be intrigued by the terraced buildings, the balconied houses, and the narrow streets.

And if to that which is of local origin the British visitor fails to respond, he can still find in Malta a "home from home." There is scarcely a sport unprovided for. It has been said that wherever the Union Jack flies, there are to be found a cricket field and a golf course. But Malta has much besides these. Football, racing, polo, tennis, hockey, sea-bathing, sailing—all these are to be had in abundance. And for indoor amusement there are the Opera House, dramatic clubs, cinemas, dances. Malta, in short, is very far from being a "mere Service station." And there are no rates or income-tax to pay! But for the hard work that has always to be done, some, indeed, might think it a Lotus-land.

Gozo is a lovelier island than Malta, greener, more fertile, less rocky. It differs,

too, from the island from which the group takes its name in that there are far fewer of those walls dividing the fields to which I have already referred. And its coastline resembles, in miniature, that of Norway.

The capital of Gozo, Rabat (or Victoria) was fortified—or rather the citadel on the great rock at the foot of which it lies was fortified—against Barbary pirates, who once infested the Mediterranean; and certainly the history of the whole people of this island (they are called Gozitans) has been as grim as that of Malta itself. It is curious to note, too, that the Gozitans have definite characteristics which demarcate them from the Maltese proper: they are tougher, “dour,” in fact they are to the Maltese as Scotsmen to Englishmen. This fact probably accounts for the excellent record which they hold as colonists; thousands of them have emigrated to Australia and to America and have done extremely well. I must repeat a story which a former Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, Sir Harry Luke (now Governor of Fiji) was fond of telling. It was of a function in Valletta at a time when the Gozitans who were leading personages in Church and State included the Archbishop of Malta. “Well,” said a Maltese worshipper after

watching the entry into the church of the procession of Archbishop and Canons and other dignitaries, mostly natives of the junior island, "I suppose we ought to be thankful that the sacristan is still a Maltese."

The constitutional question in Malta has always been a very difficult problem. Several times the people have had control of the Legislature, and every time a deadlock has resulted. In recent years the chief difficulty has arisen out of pro-Italian propaganda in the island. Religious leaders began to interfere actively in politics in 1927. In 1930, when the Roman Catholic Church appeared to be aiding the pro-Italian elements, the British suspended parliamentary government. Two years later, elections were held, and the Maltese returned to power resumed pro-Italian tendencies. They encouraged the Maltese to take advantage of free trips to Fascist Italy and to accept free Italian medical aid. This was intolerable for the British, who in 1933 once more suspended the Constitution and repealed it altogether in 1936, when the Anglo-Italian dispute over Abyssinia was at its height.

Since that date things have been easier. The British have adopted a much more liberal cultural policy towards the Maltese,

mixing freely with them in the social sense, and, in particular, substituting the Maltese language for Italian in the law-courts. The Church, too, perceived the signs of the times, and translated the Bible and catechism into Maltese. For three years all authority rested with the Governor; the place was ruled on pure Crown Colony lines.

In February 1939, a new Constitution was promulgated for Malta, giving to the people some voice, though considerably less than formerly, in their own affairs. A body known as the Council of Government is in future to consist of ten members elected on the same franchise as that provided in the 1921 Constitution, eight official members, and two members nominated by the Governor. The Governor presides over the Council and has a casting, though not an original vote, and he can restrict discussion on defence matters. Language questions are altogether excluded from the Council's discussions, and it should be added in this connection that Ministers of Religion, who previously were largely responsible for the insistence on the use of the Italian language, are not eligible for election as members of the Council.

Obviously Great Britain has profited by her past political mistakes in Malta. She

will henceforth take no chances, nor, so long as the international situation remains obscure, are the mass of the Maltese likely to protest severely against the necessitated curtailment of their erstwhile privileges.

Malta is not merely a naval base, though the Grand Harbour at Valletta is one of the best in the world, with graving docks, a large floating dock, oil tanks and naval supplies. It also has two air bases, one for flying-boats at Kalfrana, and one for aeroplanes at Hal Far, and from these, bombing expeditions would certainly go out if Malta itself were attacked. From Hal Far a squadron of the R.A.F. now undertakes oversea reconnaissance. But when the best complexion is put on it, and even allowing for the possibility of offensive action from Malta, the colony is a highly tempting object to attack : what was a veritable fortress before the advent of air power must in future be something to be held mainly for reasons of prestige.

That it could ever fall into hostile hands is, however, a thought that the Maltese simply does not permit himself. The reinforcements to Malta, brought about largely as a consequence of British arrangements with Greece and Turkey, have latterly been heavy indeed, and the island is to-day a very

formidable proposition for any would-be invader. Speaking on Empire Day, 1939, the Governor, General Sir Charles Bonham-Carter, made public some of these reinforcements. From two artillery regiments and two infantry battalions, besides the King's Own Malta Regiment of Territorials, he said, the garrison was being increased to five, possibly six, artillery regiments and four Regular and one Territorial infantry battalions. The coast defences, moreover, have been immensely strengthened; since September, 1938, the "Munich crisis," the air defences had been doubled, and the infantry defences, when the Governor spoke (May 24), were nearly completed.

The Governor concluded with this satisfactory declaration: "I can say with complete confidence that Malta is safe, and equally confidently that in a very short time she will be so strong that attacking her would be an undertaking of the utmost danger."

In 1935, when the Italians launched their invasion of Abyssinia, the British in Malta, as, indeed, in the whole Mediterranean, were caught napping. They will never be so caught again. In the event of war, Malta may possibly have an unpleasant experience, but so will its attackers, and if it is



a question of endurance, of hardship the British in Malta and the Maltese people will not be the first to yield. The island's morale is high. The Maltese, as well as any people in the world, know the capacities of the Italians in a stern struggle ; and they are not afraid.

So let us look at Malta from the strategic point of view. As all the world knows, its significance has been intensified as a result of the part which Great Britain took in the dispute which Italy had with the League of Nations over Abyssinia. For the first time, almost, the average Briton began to think of the possibility of Malta's being bombed from the air—and especially from Sicily, only 80 miles (20 minutes) away to the northward.

It was all very well, he reflected, to call Malta the headquarters of the Mediterranean fleet, a base for repairs and refitting and refuelling. It was all very well to fill the island with a large garrison. It was all very well to put up adequate anti-aircraft defences. But how would Malta serve the Navy in time of war ? Could it be used as a base at such a time ?

He recalled that, at the outbreak of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, the Mediterranean fleet congregated, not at Malta, but at

Alexandria, in the Eastern Mediterranean. And though he may have had great faith in anti-aircraft guns, he came to the conclusion that, if Malta could be defended and held, it could not continue to serve as the naval fortress for which it had been used by Great Britain for over a hundred years.

In all probability this reaction of the ordinary man was accurate. Malta would be held in time of war, but the Navy might not be there in numbers, if at all. Where it would be we must consider later. But of this we can be certain: unless a decision were taken to evacuate the whole Mediterranean basin—and though there exists a school of thought definitely in favour of such a course in time of great emergency, the Government has rejected it—Malta would not be deserted. At the moment it is extremely strongly defended, with weapons of the sailor, the soldier, and the airman. Its people are well prepared for all contingencies, and have maintained their composure. Better than any of those who might dream of attacking Malta, they can guess what would be in store for the invader.

## CHAPTER III

### CYPRUS

THE third territory in British possession in the Mediterranean, Cyprus, is no household word like Gibraltar and Malta. The Londoner may have met a Cypriot waiter in Soho, but even he might be hard put to it to say whether this jewel of an island belongs to Europe or to Asia. (That is an old question : and the answer is—Asia.) If the Briton has a leaning for history, he may remember that King Richard the Lion Heart captured the island in the name of England when on his way in 1191 to the Crusade in Palestine. But of Britain's connection with Cyprus for the last sixty years odd he is likely to know little. His ignorance would be excusable, for Cyprus, except during the last few years, has been disgracefully neglected by its overlords, and its nickname, the Cinderella of British possessions, is well deserved.

The circumstances in which Great Britain became possessed of Cyprus are almost unique. She did not conquer it. She did not buy it. She did not get it in exchange for

something. She really got it through the cleverness of one man—Disraeli.

It came about thus. After the Suez Canal was built in 1869, Disraeli, who had visited the Near East, including Cyprus and Palestine, in his youth, wanted to establish British strategic bases in the Eastern Mediterranean. He revived ideas that had been born in the 'forties for extending British influence in the Near East. He conceived only one enemy to Great Britain at that time, namely, Russia, and, consequently, his sympathies were always with the Turks, who, until after the Great War, were at constant loggerheads with the Russians.

Now in 1878 the British Government concluded with the Government of Turkey, recently defeated by Russia, a Convention for the purpose of securing for the future the Asiatic territories of the Ottoman Empire. Under this Convention, the Sultan agreed in return for a pledge that Great Britain would help defend these territories, that Cyprus should be occupied and administered by England. The pledge was subject to the condition that the Sultan would introduce necessary reforms into the government of those territories.

It was, incidentally, largely the Cyprus

Convention which enabled Disraeli to return from Berlin claiming that he had secured "peace with honour."

And so, on July 12, 1878, Sir Garnet Wolseley was appointed the first High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief of the island of Cyprus. Almost at once the Christian section of the population urged the granting of some form of self-government and the doctrinaire statesmen in Whitehall at the time responded to the demand. In 1882 they created what later events proved was an absurd Constitution. They reconstructed the Legislative Council, giving it twelve elected members and only six official members, including the High Commissioner. And very bitterly has Cyprus suffered from this original folly of giving political interests the priority over economic interests in a primitive, if historic and gifted, community. To that subject, however, I will return later.

Partly for internal reasons, but predominantly for reasons outside the island's control, Cyprus fell into a backwater from which she was not rescued until after the Great War—and indeed not even yet can she be said to be in the main stream of Imperial development. For in 1882, before the new régime in Cyprus had obtained a real

start, England occupied Egypt, and virtually governed it until independence was conferred on the Egyptians in 1922—a step which led to its logical conclusion when Egypt was admitted into the League of Nations in 1936. By that occupation the British secured control, in the strategic sense, over the Suez Canal, and, by implication, a naval and military base in the Levant which was far more important than Cyprus. Pre-occupation with Egypt led to the neglect of Cyprus, the history of which until the outbreak of war was therefore unimportant and insignificant.

When, however, the Ottoman Empire entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, the British promptly (November 5, 1914) annexed Cyprus, which was still nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire. But even then its potentialities were incompletely realised. For a year later the British actually offered Cyprus to the Greeks, on the condition that the Athens Government should at once send its forces to help Serbia, then invaded by Bulgaria. The Greeks refused the offer, and when, a year later, they did join the Allied side, the offer was no longer open.

Considerable prosperity came to Cyprus

during the Great War. The Cypriots were not conscripted, but some 10,000 of them served as volunteers with the Allied forces at Salonika. The products of the island were heavily drawn upon by the military authorities in Egypt and Palestine, and much money passed to the Cypriots in exchange for such things as timber, carobs, wine, animals, and minerals. In addition, the harbour at Famagusta (which, by the way, was bombed ineffectively by hostile aircraft) was extensively used in the loading up of materials for the use of the British armies in the Near East.

On March 10, 1925, Cyprus was given the status and name of a Colony, and the High Commissioner became a Governor.

Yet even that event caused little interest to be taken in Great Britain in the affairs of Cyprus. Not until 1931, when the Greek-speaking politicians, clamouring for "Union with Greece," had become exasperated and a mob had burned down Government House in Nicosia, did the average Briton realise the importance of Cyprus. The situation looked ugly for a time, and troops were hastily despatched from Egypt. But there was no stamina in the rebellion, which soon died out.

From this unexpected, but, to the initiated, not improbable occurrence, the British

learned one lesson, namely, that it was folly to allow such scope to the politically-minded leaders of Cyprus. They exiled certain leaders, including ecclesiastics (and the Greek Church in Cyprus has never confined itself to things of the next world), and they abolished the Constitution. Since 1931 the British have ruled by means of nominated Cypriot representatives, and with a great deal of success.

But the cry for some form of self-government is not absent. The Greek-speaking Cypriot may to-day see that his slogan of "Union with Greece" is quite impracticable, but he does want some restitution of political liberties. Up to now it has been officially considered that he is not fit yet to be trusted with such liberties—a verdict with which the mass of the people may be content enough, but which a handful of lawyers, landowners, moneylenders, and journalists never cease to dispute.

It is a quarrel into which there is no space in such a book as this to enter. Possibly, if the Admiralty and the Air Ministry were to develop Cyprus into a naval and air base and so bring the sort of prosperity enjoyed by Malta, the political claims of the Cypriots would lose their edge. Possibly, if a direct



shipping line between Cyprus and England were established, if more and more tourists were attracted to the colony, if good commercial harbours and good hotels were built, the Cypriots might willingly see their political dreams founder in the blissfulness of material content : but, though much has been done in recent years for their welfare, it has been on a small, a local scale. It is the Government of Cyprus, not the Government at Westminster, which has so worked, and in circumstances such as these it seems improbable that the political agitation, subterranean though it be, will entirely vanish.

Yet it would be misleading to suggest that during, say, the first fifty years of the British connection with Cyprus, nothing was done for the island. It has been said bitterly, and by British critics, that Cyprus attracted only officials who were either tired or retired. There have been official misfits in Cyprus, let it be freely admitted, men who took the trouble to learn neither of the languages of the island, Greek and Turkish. But in recent years, and more especially in the last half-dozen years, there has been a new type of official in Cyprus, young, keen, thorough. This in time will surely bear fruit.

Yet even before the advent of the more vigorous régime of to-day something had been accomplished. In 1878 all was desolation, decay, waste. There were then but 180,000 people in all. Its magnificent fortresses, monasteries, and cathedrals were largely in ruins. Communities were non-existent. So, too, was public security. Education was primitive. Of public hygiene the public had no conception. Agriculture was left to the apathetic whims of the farmer. The peasants were chronically in debt. Forests were eaten by animals. (The depredations of the goat still remain one of the main problems in Cyprus.) And the national resources of the country were quite untapped.

To-day the population numbers over 350,000. Restoration of the architectural wonders of Cyprus is actively pursued. A thousand miles of roads have been constructed. Public security is excellent. Education has improved out of all recognition. There are numerous hospitals and free medical treatment for poor persons. The Agricultural Department is extremely active in the help it gives to the farmer in demonstrating how to rear fruit trees, raise crops, improve livestock. The problem of peasant

indebtedness has not yet been solved, but the moneylenders at any rate fear an early solution. And in respect of minerals, the discovery of copper pyrites and asbestos has added thousands of pounds to the islanders' wealth.

All is not yet well with the internal condition of Cyprus, however, and it would be folly to pretend it is. Malaria and tuberculosis have not yet been mastered ; co-operation between agricultural and industrial Cypriots is still rudimentary ; more can be done for education. But Cyprus can run no faster than its Exchequer allows. Though the British Empire can justly be blamed for its neglect of the island during the first few decades of its connection, something was then accomplished and very much more has been accomplished during recent years.

The people of Cyprus can roughly be divided into two sections : the Greek-speaking, Christian section which is roughly 80 per cent. of the whole, and the Turkish, Moslem section which comprises the remainder. The former derive from colonists from the mainland of Greece, the latter from the Ottoman Turks of the mainland of Anatolia. By the educated of both sections English, the official language of the island, is

understood, and many Turks speak and understand Greek, and vice versa. Modern Greek and Turkish are, naturally, officially recognised languages. And there are in addition to the Greeks and Turks small communities of Armenians and Jews.

Those who know how politically-minded the Greek of Greece is and are aware of the unceasing agitation which Greek Cypriots maintain against what they consider the deprivation of their political rights; who realise, moreover, how the Orthodox Church in Cyprus busies itself in political affairs, just as certain mediæval ecclesiastics busied themselves in the affairs of State in England, may imagine that the Greek Cypriot is an unpleasant creature, potentially seditious and ungrateful for material benefits.

It is true that the Greek Cypriots have certain qualities which do not commend themselves to the Englishman placed in their midst. They are commonly suspicious, they are prodigal, they listen too readily to the priest who does not confine himself to spiritual advice. But they have—and especially the Greek-speaking peasants—abundant compensations. For they are cheerful, simple, and, on the whole, hard-working. They are noticeably hospitable. Poor

though they may be, they think nothing of abiding by the honourable Near Eastern tradition of giving food free to the stranger.

Dressed in baggy black or indigo knee-breeches, the Greek peasants are picturesque, especially when massed together in one of their numerous festivals. They love dancing and poetry. And they are moral. They respond quickly to human kindness and are quite ready to obey a Governor or Commissioner provided that he identifies their interests with his own.

The Turks have always been regarded as the element in Cyprus which is the most loyal to Great Britain. Comprising but one-fifth of the population they have looked, and have not looked in vain, to Britain to protect their distinctive ways. Their religion and their social customs have not been interfered with in any way. But no one could call the Turks of Cyprus during the past fifty years progressively-minded. The quicker-witted Greeks have got ahead of them commercially. Yet a change, a new spirit has been perceptible in the Turkish Cypriots in recent years. They have instituted co-operative societies in the villages and have a "Savings Bank" (capital, £50,000) of their own. And among the younger Turks of Cyprus is developing

an inquiring spirit, ~~an~~ urge to look for opportunities beyond their island confines.

For years the Turkish Cypriots voted with the British against the Greeks on the Legislative Council : on only one occasion, so far as I remember, did the Turkish Cypriot throw in his hand with the Greeks, and so long as the Legislative Council endured, it merely stereotyped the division between the two main communities of the colony. A real effort is now being made, however, to instil in all Cypriots, of whatever creed, a sense of the importance of being citizens of the British Empire. The villagers are well aware that a wholly new and invigorating interest is being taken in their lot, and though it would be extravagant to say that they are wholly reconciled to it, numerous gratifying instances of spontaneous loyalty to the British connection have been witnessed recently. One thing is certain : while Greece and Turkey remain friendly to Great Britain, no foreign Power would have the slightest chance of raising any dangerous disaffection in Cyprus. The Cypriots can be led and they can be taught. They are not, in the mass, an easy people, for apathy is bitten deep into them, and centuries of stagnation and decay under the

Ottomans have left their mark. But they are to-day the object of such care, material and cultural, as they have never been in modern times, and once they are enabled to realise that they are in the full stream of Imperial endeavour, their active sentiments need not be doubted.

Cyprus, for all the neglect of hundreds of years, is an island of enchantment. Softer, more varied, infinitely more beautiful is it than either Gibraltar or Malta. The aura of classic loveliness still pervades it—it is the only island of classical romance ruled over by the British. All kinds of conquerors, pagan, Christian, and Moslem, have passed over it, and relics of their times are constantly being found. Long before the Christian era it was known as the Land of Flowers and the abode of the Goddess of Love. In those far-off days, indeed, it boasted a million inhabitants; but even to-day, fallen from its high estate though it is, it can allure and fascinate, and hold the affections.

Cyprus is a large island—in the whole Mediterranean only Sicily and Sardinia are larger. Its area is 3,584 square miles—thirty times the size of Malta, or about the size of Kent, Sussex, and Surrey combined.

The climate is dry<sup>d</sup> and healthy ; the island is in fact one of the healthiest spots in the whole of the Eastern Mediterranean. In summer in the plains it is very hot, but the visitor can easily escape thence to the mountains, which, with their pine trees and bracken, are as refreshing and as stimulating as the Lebanon Mountains in Syria. It is to the mountains of Troodos, the Simla of Cyprus, 6,000 feet high, that the seat of government moves in June, July, and August.

A word must be said on the chief towns of Cyprus, were it only in order to repeat their lovely, poetical names. The visitor is likely to land at Famagusta, a memorable sight with its walls and ruined churches. Towering above the twenty-foot-thick walls is the Cathedral of St. Nicholas, now a mosque.

In the capital, Nicosia, is the great Cathedral of St. Sophia, now also a mosque. Here are streets down which the picturesque villagers go with their camels and donkeys, bearing the produce of their gardens. The capital is full of historical monuments, particularly of mediæval times. And the villages round about are carpeted with fields, ablaze with tulips and anemones—a sight that only poets could fitly describe. But the whole island is a land of flowers.



Perhaps the finest Gothic building in the Levant is the Abbey of Bella Paise, near Kyrenia, a town with deep dungeons, and, towering above it, the castle of St. Hilarion, which is a building straight out of a fairy book. It is like a Cornish village in which it is easy to conjure up the Knights of the Round Table.

In the south of the island are the towns of Larnaca and Limassol. Larnaca is one of the most important harbours of the island, and at Limassol Richard the Lion Heart married Berengaria of Navarre.

The chief charm of Cyprus, apart from its natural and architectural beauties (and its cheapness), lies in the fact that it is still quite unspoilt. The Greek peasant, for example, still wears his baggy trousers. The Turkish population still wears the fez, largely unmoved by the example of the inhabitants of Turkey, who have discarded that becoming headgear. There has been no interference with the customs of the islanders, and if you would understand how the Greeks and Turks of olden time used to live, go, not to Athens or Ankara, but to Cyprus. There you can literally wallow in romance, in classical memories, in sentimentalising the past.

But all is not revelling in the sunshine, the

blue seas, the fir-clad hills of Cyprus. The climate and the scenery may induce a lethargic attitude towards life, but work must go on all the same.

The backbone of the island's economy is in agriculture. Among the products of Cyprus are cotton, barley, wheat, oats, carobs, flax, grapes, olives, oranges, tobacco, fruits, and vegetables. Each of these products has its peculiar merits, but I would single out the orange, the grape, and the tobacco of Cyprus. All these are obtainable now in England (the grape also in the form of wine and brandy) and very excellent they are. In these fields there is an almost certain scope for increased exports.

Minerally, Cyprus is rich, a fact well known in ancient times. There are copper, iron, asbestos, chromium, and marble. Some mining has been done, but it is generally agreed that the mineral deposits are worth more exhaustive investigation than they have so far received.

But the trade which, in the lay view at any rate, could most easily be improved, is the tourist trade. Already much has been done in recent years to attract visitors in the summer months from Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq. What is most of all required is better

shipping communication<sup>4</sup> with Cyprus and the erection of more good hotels. Cyprus has only to look at the neighbouring island of Rhodes to see the benefits that might be conferred in this regard. The average tourist demands comfort, and if he is of the sort that flies into a passion when cold water runs from hot taps he may fail to bring back the impression of Cyprus which he should receive. A sometimes queer mentality has the tourist, but it is understood in the neighbouring countries of Egypt and Palestine. Why not in Cyprus?

What place is Cyprus to play in Imperial strategy? That is indeed a poser. We have seen how Disraeli obtained the island as a lever against the ambitions of Russia in the Near East, how the occupation of Egypt four years after that of Cyprus militated against the development of the island, and we know, moreover, that it was not much used, except as a source from which vital materials were drawn, in the Great War itself.

To-day, the circumstances are entirely altered. There is no imminent threat by Russia to British influence in the Near East, though the future is difficult to foresee. Yet, though there has been much talk of

developing naval and air bases in Cyprus, little has actually been constructed. The island is as far removed as ever it was from being the fortress, say, Malta has become. Both naval and air experts have recently visited it, to survey its possibilities, but at the time of writing nothing concrete has emerged from their reports.

That there may be good arguments against further utilising Cyprus in a strategical sense is conceivable. But to the inexpert mind its possibilities appeal strongly. It overlooks most conveniently the vital port of Haifa, in Palestine, which is one of the two Mediterranean terminals of the oil-pipe line from Iraq ; and it is the nearest British possession to the strongly fortified Italian islands of the Dodecanese. Cyprus is 44 miles away from the southern coast of Asia Minor—and to-day Turkey is very friendly indeed towards Great Britain ; it is 69 miles away from Latakia in Syria—and the Mandatory Power for Syria is similarly friendly ; it is 155 miles from Haifa, and 205 miles from Port Said. The Dodecanese Islands lie 270 miles away to the westward.

It would seem that Cyprus is ideally situated to act as a fender for Haifa and to

safeguard the approach to the Suez Canal. A harbour could be made at Famagusta, and sites for aerodromes could be found on the plain of Messaria. Even a defence force, analogous to the Royal Malta Artillery, could be established. But, as already said, nothing has been done in this direction so far.

For a time, admittedly, it looked as though Cyprus might come more prominently into the Imperial picture. In 1931, Imperial Airways flying-boats, to shorten the journey to the East, flew, after leaving Athens, via Castelrosso in the Dodecanese Islands over the south-western end of Cyprus to Tiberias, the Lake of Galilee, Palestine. But in peacetime no Imperial Airways machines touch or even fly over Cyprus: they go eastwards via Alexandria. The aeroplanes that are most frequently seen in Cyprus to-day are those of an Egyptian Company, Misr Airworks.

It has been suggested that Annex 2 of the Anglo-Italian Agreement, by which the British government agreed to notify the Italian government in advance of any decision to provide new naval or air bases east of longitude 19° E. (and Cyprus would be covered by this stipulation) has prevented anything being done to improve the strategic potentialities of the island. But the hypo-

thesis is not tenable. Meanwhile those who know Cyprus will lament that the many admirable sites which exist on its central plain for aerodromes are not being utilised, and that the Limassol salt-lake is not being used by flying-boats and sea-planes. From the air point of view, especially, the neglect of Cyprus is astonishing. Take Rutbah Wells, the mid-Syrian Desert station to which all British aeroplanes eastward-bound now fly. By way of Cyprus the journey is from Athens 150 miles less than it is by the present route via Alexandria and Gaza.

But Cyprus remains neglected, though not forgotten. It is in these circumstances of awaiting such a general decision as might revolutionise or at least profoundly affect the economy of the island, namely, whether or not Cyprus is to be defensively or offensively utilised against emergencies, that those responsible for its progress have had to work and to administer. With what success they have put their backs into this task, disregarding the talk of succulent seeds in the shape of naval and air bases, is obvious to any visitor to-day.

## CHAPTER IV

### PALESTINE

JUST as India, as has been shown in the Prologue to this book, is responsible in the last analysis for the presence of Great Britain in the Mediterranean, so the Suez Canal, the short cut to India and beyond, is responsible for the presence of Great Britain in Palestine. But whereas the British secured Gibraltar, Malta, and Cyprus to "have and to hold," the conquest of Palestine, splendid though it was, was but a "side-show" of the Great War. It was all part of the necessity to defeat the Central Powers, and actually, when hostilities against the Turks were begun from Egypt, it was not intended to do more than occupy the Sinai Desert. The later conquest of Palestine and Syria was forced by circumstances.

It is tempting to be wise after the event, and to argue that, in view of the whole British position in the Near and Middle East to-day, the occupation of Palestine was part of a far-sighted strategic plan. But the facts are against such a theory. The advance

through Palestine was dictated quite as much by considerations of Britain's position in Europe as by her position in the Near East.

The safety of the Suez Canal was of prime importance to Great Britain, and when Turkey, on November 5, 1914, declared war against the Allied Powers, there was in Egypt a considerable British force for the purpose at once of safeguarding the Canal and of preventing entrance by any hostile force into Egypt. At first it was thought that the Sinai Desert, a particularly inhospitable stretch of sand and steppe, would bar any approach on the Canal by Turkish troops from Palestine. Napoleon had said, speaking of his own campaigns in Egypt and Syria : " Of all obstacles which can cover the frontiers of Empires, a desert, similar to this, is incontestably the greatest." But if there were any British officers in Egypt who believed in this maxim, they were soon undeceived.

The Turks in 1915 made two great attacks on the Canal, and it was decided by the British in consequence to advance eastwards across the desert. How successfully they did so, laying a railway and a water-pipe line at the same time, is well known. Nor is there need to recapitulate the progress of the



campaign of General Allenby, a close student of geography, whose two textbooks throughout were the Bible and George Adam Smith's *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*. The advance of his troops over barren hillsides, malarial marshes, and tropical valleys, and in face of stubborn and often gallant resistance by the Turks, is one of the most brilliant feats in British military history. It was inexorably pursued, so that at the end of the War the British found themselves masters not only of the land we now call Palestine, but of the greater part of Syria also, having driven the Turk out of Damascus and Aleppo and all the country to the southwards.

The details of the unforgettable conquest, in which troops, both white and brown, from all over the Empire took part, are available in many books: there is no room to reiterate them here.

In 1917, with only a certain amount of Palestine wrested from the Turks, a Military Administration was set up, and this lasted until 1920. But by this time the politicians were seriously considering the future status of Palestine. Already, in November 1917, there had been promulgated one document, the Balfour Declaration, in which was promised to the Jews a National Home in

Palestine, that had<sup>1</sup> a bearing on its future ; and there were others, affecting principally the Arab population, which at the time of the Armistice comprised 93 per cent. of the whole.

In the spring of 1920, at a conference at San Remo, the British had conferred upon them—that is the usual way of describing an action in which the British were scarcely silent witnesses—a mandate for Palestine, a mandate confirmed by the League of Nations two years later. On July 1, 1920, the Military Administration, against which, incidentally but significantly, the Zionists had made many complaints, was superseded by a Civil Administration, with Sir Herbert Samuel (now Lord Samuel) as first High Commissioner. Sir Herbert was an extremely conscientious High Commissioner, governing with the impartiality of a Civil Servant, and although the Arabs very early in his régime manifested their dislike of the Zionist policy, and though the Zionists were gravely disappointed in him, having expected some partial treatment from a man who himself was a Jew, there is to-day in both Arab and Jewish camps a sort of wistful looking back to his time, as to days when riots and killings were largely unknown.

But, for all the felicity of the administration of the first High Commissioner, the seeds of trouble were implicit in the Mandate itself. His successor, Field-Marshal Plumer (1925-1928), was indeed so struck by the tranquillity of the Holy Land as to advise that all troops be withdrawn from it; in their place he created a Gendarmerie, recruited extensively from the "Black and Tans" of Ireland. The dangers of this move were quickly seen in the time of his successor, Sir John Chancellor, a most able Governor who was decidedly unlucky in the circumstances of his tenure of office (1928-1931). In 1929 the famous "Wailing Wall" incident broke out, and troops were brought back to Palestine to restore order. They have never been able to leave; on the contrary, their numbers have been vastly increased.

There is no space here to go into all the vicissitudes of what is known as "the Palestine problem," which became like a recurring decimal. To Sir John Chancellor succeeded General Sir Arthur Wauchope, during whose time of office occurred the persecution of Jews in Europe, and the consequent pressure on Palestine to admit more and more Jewish immigrants. Such immigrants reached their peak number in 1935, when

over 60,000 were legally admitted. Rumbings of Arab rebellion became ominous, and in April, 1936, the storm broke—that storm which is not yet quite over.

It falls to Sir Harold MacMichael, who succeeded General Wauchope in 1937, to inaugurate the new policy which all must hope will bring peace at last to the Holy Land.

This policy has been evolved as a consequence of the conferences in London which the British Government had early this year with Palestinian Arabs, with representatives of the States neighbouring Palestine, and with the Jewish Agency. With the Jewish Agency it was quickly apparent that the Mandatory Power could not agree, for that Agency envisaged continual immigration until the Jews should be in a numerical majority in Palestine—and the Government had realised beforehand that this immigration was at the very base of the Arab fears and the prime cause of the revolt which the Arabs had been conducting for three years past.

Nor was it found possible to secure agreement with the Arabs, though the respective points of view of the Mandatory Power and of the Arabs more nearly converged than in

the case of the Jews. The upshot was that the Government had to declare its own policy.

The long-awaited Statement of Policy appeared in May, 1939, and immediately provoked hostile comment and some manifestations by the Jews; nor did it receive the assent of the Arabs. Briefly, it envisaged the establishment within ten years of an independent Palestine State, with safeguards for all the various interests, Arab, Jewish, and British, in Palestine. It decreed that Jewish immigration should continue for five years, with a total immigration of 75,000, if economic conditions permitted, after which further Jewish immigrants could enter only with Arab consent. Arrangements were made for the setting up of the machinery of government so soon as order should be restored—and, the White Paper implied, if certain interests refused to co-operate, so much the worse for them, for the plan would be enforced.

This policy was a bold attempt to steer between Scylla and Charybdis—in other words, it refused the claim of the Arabs to the setting up of an Arab State in Palestine and the demand for the immediate cessation of Jewish immigration, and it also refused the

demand of the Jews for the indefinite continuance of immigration and for the postponement of independence until the Jews should be in a numerical majority.

Now that the Government have declared their policy it will be the hope of all unbiased persons who love Palestine that, at last, some goodwill will be born there, and that, the political content of Zionism having been eradicated, Arabs and Jews may collaborate for the sake of Palestine. Plainly it is to be seen that, failing some collaboration, Great Britain will remain for more than ten years as Mandatory Power of Palestine. But in any case, the Imperial aspects will be safeguarded, and, indeed, there is no disposition anywhere in the Holy Land to disregard or to over-ride the fact that Great Britain has paramount strategic interests there, interests which will be protected by her continued presence as Mandatory or in the form of a treaty with independent Palestine.

A land of infinite variety and infinite attraction, though but some 10,000 square miles in area, that is, the size of Wales, Palestine is always divided by geographers into three sub-regions, the coastal plain, the mountainous plain, and the desert. On the

coastal plain, which stretches from Acre in the north to Gaza in the south, are grown most of the oranges for which Palestine even before the war was famous and which to-day constitute its greatest industry. Its distance from the inland hills varies. At Acre it is about four miles ; at Haifa it opens out into the Plain of Esdraelon, which runs almost across the country ; contracts, to the south of Haifa, to but a hundred yards or so ; and southwards again its width extends to some twenty miles. This coastal plain was rich even in Biblical times, and under the impetus of Zionist colonisation it has become so again. On the Zionist colonies in Palestine I must say a word later.

The plateau, still inhabited predominantly by Arabs, is cut by the Plain of Esdraelon. On the north is Galilee, and on the south are Judæa and Samaria. On the east of this mountainous region lie the River Jordan and the Dead Sea—a sub-tropical, marvellous region lowering hundreds of feet below sea-level. The fissure that constitutes this valley is one of the most remarkable in the world. It is no easy place in which to live, and though there are Europeans in it to-day, the Romans, when they occupied Palestine, used negroes to cultivate it.

Finally, there is the desert, no inconsiderable part of Palestine. This lies wholly in the south. We need to be clear what we mean by desert, for we have heard much about efforts in Palestine making the desert "blossom as the rose." A desert is any place, low-lying or high, on which insufficient rainfall falls to raise crops, or in which there is either unsuitable sub-surface water or none at all, and it is adequately true to say that in this sense the desert of Palestine has been practically untouched.

Of real rivers Palestine has none except the Jordan, a muddy stream which empties itself hurriedly, after descending hundreds of feet from its source in Syria, into a dead end—the Dead Sea. The Yarmuk, the Kishon, the Zerqa, and the Auja, the only other streams which are dignified by the name of river, make some showing in the winter, but are apt to be insignificant in the summer.

But Palestine has two lakes, Lake Huleh, for long a malaria-producing spot, and Lake Tiberias, or the Sea of Galilee. By this last sheet of water, and especially overlooking it, are some of the loveliest sights in Palestine.

But in a hundred places there are superb views in Palestine. Mountain and plain are never far apart, nor is the blue Mediterranean



far away. Even the barren hills of Judæa, tortured cruel hills, have a loveliness, while from any place the sunsets over the sea are gorgeous. In spring-time the countryside is carpeted with wild flowers, flowers which little Arab boys are wont to collect and to hold up for the traveller passing by in a car.

It is impossible to divest oneself of the quintessentially religious character of the land, a fact which often leads to sentimentalising, but were there no Jews, no Christians, no Moslems in Palestine it would still be a hauntingly lovely land. Its face has been changed in many spots during the last two decades, but its appeal remains. Caravans of camels trek along the sea-shore and along the main roads, to break off on tracks used by beasts for thousands of years; cars, keeping to the right of the road, speed busily from centre to centre; in the countryside you see tractors churning the ground and the primitive oxen (or even camel) plough on neighbouring fields; men ride on donkeys while others use the aeroplane: yet all these contrasts seem not incongruous, they but add to the charm of the place. It occurs to nobody except the incorrigible romanticist or the impatient "go-getter" that any of such things is out of place.

But it is undeniably in the remote countryside of Palestine, where men sing songs to themselves to drive loneliness away or for sheer joy, that the essence of the land steals over the casual sojourner. There his mind goes back to the hosts who have conquered Palestine during the centuries, to pagan warriors from Asia and Africa, to the Roman Legions, to the fearless Moslems, to the valiant Crusaders—the kaleidoscope of history is ever full of colour. Palestine is a peerless, a unique land, and those responsible for its destiny have a unique privilege.

To think that it should ever become as other countries are, with over-bearing nationalisms, soulless industries, its people conforming to a monotonous pattern; to imagine its innate chivalry and hospitality dying out under stress of modern circumstances and fashions; to picture its religion decaying into a sterile agnosticism—this indeed is most melancholy. But there are signs that it may be so. Politics have wrought evil in the Holy Land, and all who love it must hope that smiling faces will soon again appear on its countryside.

A description of the towns of Palestine could fill many pages. Each has its distinctive aspects, as is, indeed, decreed by history,

for Palestine has never ruled itself, and the individuality of its component parts is most marked. This peculiarity and distinctiveness persist to this day, especially in the costumes worn in particular districts, though under the stress of modern circumstances uniformity is surely gaining the upper hand. It is, in fact, to capture and record the charm and colour of an age that is fast disappearing that the Palestine Folk Museum was founded a few years ago.

First of the towns comes the capital, the Holy City of Jerusalem. This consists of the Old City, walled about, and harbouring shrines sacred to Jew, Christian, and Moslem, and of a vast new suburb, largely the creation of Jewish immigrants. Inside the walls life goes on as it has for hundreds of years, with gravity and unscurrying feet ; here is a City of Faith, wherein men's thoughts, sadly commercialised though religious life in Palestine often is, are set on eternal values. The open-minded Westerner may grieve over the narrowness and jealousies of its beliefs as much as he enjoys the narrowness and picturesqueness of its labyrinthine ways ; but there still are truly holy men in the Holy City.

Outside the walls, the picture is as different

as could be imagined. Here are business, advancement, what the West calls "progress." This is the "New Zion," pulsating (at least in less abnormal times than the present) with activity of every kind. Outside the walls, too, on Mount Scopus, is the cemetery of the British dead, wherein are buried 2,534 soldiers from all parts of the British Empire. (In other cemeteries in Palestine there are another 7,500 buried.) And farther still, on the Mount of Olives, is the Hebrew University.

Jerusalem is a magnificent city in which to live. It stands some 2,500 feet above sea-level, is never too hot, and the views from it, particularly eastwards over the Jordan Valley towards the mountains of Moab, never pall.

The most densely populated city in Palestine, Tel Aviv, is in a very distinct category. This place, which was started on sand dunes a few years before the War, is the only wholly Jewish town in the world. One needs to be a Jew to take pride in it. Everything in it is modern, not to say "advanced." It harbours all kinds of men and women, eager, critical, resolute. It is the pride of Zionism, a centre of restless energy, of creative planning. But it is

indisputably ugly, unlike anything else in Palestine. Yet it moves, going its own way. Quite recently, and in order to avoid using the neighbouring port of Jaffa, it has built a jetty, from which considerable trade has been done.

The third largest city is Haifa, overlooked by Mount Carmel. The fine harbour that has been constructed there by the Government is, from Carmel, a noble sight : there can be few lovelier harbours in the world. In the town itself there are Arab and Jewish quarters, and, a little beyond, in the Bay of Acre, is a terminal of the Iraq Petroleum Company, from which 2,000,000 tons of oil are annually taken away in tankers which fill off-shore. The modernisation of Haifa was inevitable, for the only other harbour, Jaffa, is but an open roadstead. But the purist shakes his head as he sees villa after villa erected on the 'superb slopes of Mount Carmel : business is business, he admits, but he wonders why it should so often spoil the scene.

To discuss the peoples of Palestine is like discussing the peoples of the world, for truly representatives of almost every land are to be found somewhere in the Holy Land. Christians of every creed, Moslems of every

sect, Jews with all kinds of beliefs—these and many more are gathered together in a country that is no larger than Yorkshire. You can see the oldest ways of living side by side with the newest, veiled women and women in shorts, camel traffic and motor traffic, mechanical tractors and ox-led ploughs, and as for the variety of headgear there is no end to it.

For practical purposes, however, it is convenient to divide the people into Arabs (both Moslem and Christian) on the one hand and Jews on the other. The former number about 1,000,000, the latter 450,000.

The ethnologists insist that the Arabs of Palestine are not, racially speaking, true Arabs at all. There is little doubt that they were in the land before the Arab invasion of the seventh century, nor can it be denied that the many conquering races that have occupied Palestine from time to time have left their mark on the permanent population. This scientific fact, however, does not prevent the native Palestinians from thinking and acting like the Arabs of the great Arabian peninsula, and to-day, when Nationalism is at a premium, it would be absurd to insist on the racial impurities of the Arabs. They feel themselves to be part of the great

Arab family, and this is a sentiment which will survive any blood test.

These Palestinian Arabs are not the primitive, slothful creatures which certain propaganda has made them out to be. On the contrary, they are quick-witted, very keen on education, well able to take advantage of modern methods when they have the means. Many of them, it is true, are still desperately poor, and it is a frequent source for wonder how they eke out a living from their barren hills. But somehow they hold on: they have watched many foreign legions thunder past, and, at the end of it all, they emerge, often scathed but still intact. They have a virility and a fortitude which are the hall-marks of the peasant in the East.

Yet these Arabs, fatalistic as are many Moslem peoples, can be roused to fanaticism, especially if religious rallying cries be added to the call of Nationalism. In such a mood they can be guilty of such savagery as shocks the West, and, too, their own educated leaders. If they feel that their honour is endangered, they will strike regardless of the consequences. Long-suffering, but not possessed of illimitable patience, they have periods of relapsing into quietude, but only the more fiercely to break out when it is

plausibly represented that their existence is threatened. It has taken a long time for the British to understand the Palestine Arab psychology, which responds to firmness but resents injustice, but comprehension of this problem is completer to-day than it has ever been before.

Much has been made of the differences existing between the Arabs in Palestine—and various differences do undoubtedly exist—but there is a bewildering variety among the Jews in Palestine also. Every type of Jew is found in Palestine to-day. There is the Oriental Jew, who perfectly understands his Semitic brother, the Arab ; he, as often as not, is in Palestine for purely religious motives. There is the unostentatious Jew, who loves to work in his Holy Land, content with the task in hand and never dreaming of political domination. There is the idealist, frequently atheistic Jew, who is there to build up a new Zion, often with the sweat of his brow. There is the business-man, intent on quick returns or handsome dividends. There is the politically-minded Jew, who would hold up everything in Palestine unless, indirectly, it redounds to the credit of Jewry. In truth, the Jews in Palestine are a mixed people,



criticising others, criticising themselves.

But what the Jews have done has to be seen to be believed. It is true that they have acquired some of the best parts of the country: but how they have transformed it! They have drained marshes, built roads, grown trees on formerly waste ground; they have created factories, shops, houses by the thousand—and all this in the space of but twenty years. Any discussion of Jewish labour from a political angle is out of place in a book like this: suffice it to say that no unbiased observer can withhold admiration for the way in which the Zionists, and particularly the pioneering colonists, have worked to regenerate the land. They are filled with a mission, but they seek to convert, not souls, but a soil that for long centuries lay fallow.

But—and this is the real tragedy of modern Palestine—the Arabs and the Zionists have never understood each other, in the sense that understanding implies mutual sympathy and tolerance. Each has been jealous of the other, and so a bedrock of hate or mistrust has been reached.

Let us turn from controversial subjects to objective descriptions of other facets of Palestine's life. Take its industries, largely

non-existent before the Great War. One of the most astonishing industries is carried on in the oppressive climate of the Dead Sea. Here the Palestine Potash Company, with both Jewish and Arab workmen, extract, by evaporation, the salts in which those waters wherein no fish can live are so rich. At one time this Dead Sea was looked upon as an El Dorado, but the returns of the exploiting company, though impressive enough, have belied the optimistic statements which some people made about the possibilities of the Dead Sea.

Jerusalem and its neighbourhood are supplied with electricity by an English Company, but the greater part of Palestine gets its light from a Jewish Company, started by a remarkable personality, Pinhas Rutenberg. Even Arab villages (the town of Nablus is a notable exception—that prefers to carry on with kerosene lamps) take their lighting from this company, which has its main generating station at the junction of the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers.

In the Bay of Acre are the great works of the Iraq Petroleum Company, an international concern, part British, part Dutch, part American, and part French. Thither comes the pipe line from its source across the

Syrian Desert in Kirkuk, over 600 miles away. This line is buried but a few feet under the earth. Its construction was one of the most notable feats of modern times, but, as readers of the papers will remember, rebellious Arabs, especially in the region of the Jordan Valley, found means of puncturing it scores of times. Haifa is the headquarters of the I.P.C. in the East, its head office being in London.

Other industries comprise a multitude of goods—for instance, cement, silk stockings, artificial teeth, matches, soap, chocolates, biscuits, tobacco. Most of these things are produced for local consumption, and, industrially speaking, Palestine has made little impression on the outside world. Its excess of imports over exports has in fact been a constant preoccupation with the authorities.

Communications in Palestine are excellent, by both road and rail. There were railways in the country before the War, though many miles of track were laid down during it. But the roads, in the sense of ways suitable for motor traffic, have almost all been laid down since, and for these the Government deserves the highest commendation. In many places the gradient is steep, and the hills

have to be wound round, necessitating steep banking, but so good is the surface that only a reckless driver (and he is no *rara avis* in Palestine) can come to grief. The roads in Scotland are not better made.

Finally, I must say something of the sanctity of Palestine. What goes on in the name of religion in Palestine often shocks the devout; superstition, credulity, commercialisation abound. Many of the alleged "holy sites" are false. A reverent Armenian who once showed me round the Holy Places in Jerusalem said to me: "You of the West believe in religion: we of the East manufacture it for you." Frankness and accuracy could not go further than that.

Yet, when all is said and done, there is something in Palestine which makes it peculiar, which heightens the vision, intensifies the thought. I have seen men and women—Christians and Jews—in tears, as, with the boat steaming up to the landing stage at Haifa, they approached the Holy Land. It is an emotion not to be despised, for it springs from the depths of the human soul.

Nor should it be supposed that the Moslem cherishes Palestine less than followers of other monotheistic faiths. To him, Jeru-

saalem, with its Dome of the Rock, is the third holiest shrine in all Islam—Mecca and Medina, in which respectively the Prophet Mohammed was born and was buried, alone preceding it. Palestine is, and will ever remain, a Land of Three Faiths.

To each his own taste, but for my part there is nothing more beautiful in Palestine than the glimpse of the waters of Galilee that one gets on approaching Tiberias from the Nazareth road. Spiritual experience easily becomes overlaid in the Holy Land, but thence can come an exultation which no other country can produce in quite the same degree, and it is such scenes of the countryside as meet the imaginative eye as the traveller goes down to the Lake of Galilee that enables him to forget the transient and to remember the eternal message.

From the strategic point of view, Palestine is most obviously important because of its relation to the Suez Canal, from which it is separated only by the Sinai Peninsula. Manifestly the Canal is more easily defensible if the same Power, or forces friendly to that Power, hold both sides of it. Special provision has been made in the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty for the protection of this vital waterway, and special provision will doubtless also

be made for it in any Anglo-Palestinian Treaty of the future.

But for a host of other reasons Palestine has become strategically important since the War. For one thing, one terminal of the oil-pipe line from Iraq has been placed on its shores, at Haifa, and though that pipe line at the moment provides only some 4 per cent. of Britain's total import of oil, the Kirkuk fields from which it comes are among the richest in the world, and could at any chosen moment be made to yield far more than they do now.

Again, Palestine and Trans-Jordan between them control the port of Aqaba, on the Gulf of Aqaba at the head of the Red Sea. It has often been categorically reported in the foreign Press that Aqaba has been made a British naval base, and stories of its fortifications are constantly appearing in the papers. In fact, nothing of a military or naval character has been done there since the Great War, but its potentialities remain. It has even been suggested that it might be joined to the Mediterranean by means of a canal, rivalling the Suez Canal, cut through the desert part of Palestine.

Palestine, moreover, is important strategically, owing to the vast hinterland lying

behind it, a hinterland which increasingly will become dependent upon the ports of Palestine for its trade. At the moment of writing a vast all-weather road is being constructed from Baghdad, on the Euphrates, to Haifa, and the very fact that that section of it which lies in the mandated territories of Trans-Jordan and Palestine is being constructed under the ægis of the Royal Engineers emphasises its quasi-military nature.

To the British Admiralty, the premier port of Palestine, Haifa, has always appealed. Although, owing to conditions laid down in the Mandate, it has not been possible to convert it into a naval base, it has considerable potentialities as such, and since both the Arabs and the Jews are fully alive to the Imperial interests of Great Britain in Palestine, the time may conceivably come when Haifa, already the third largest port in the Eastern Mediterranean, becomes more than a temporary home for part of the British Fleet.

Of its use as an air centre, both civil and military, it is sufficient to look at the map to see the potentialities of Palestine. It is on the direct route to the Persian Gulf, India and Australia. Aviation has increased enor-

mously in Palestine in recent years, and more than once the supreme command there has been under an Air Officer. From Palestine any part of the Near and Middle East can quickly be reached and reinforced from the air.

Finally, the advantages of a military garrison in Palestine are obvious. Given the peaceful conditions in the Holy Land which the new policy of the Mandatory Power predicates, the garrison of Palestine, described officially as the nucleus of a Middle Eastern Reserve, could be utilised at any point in neighbouring lands in which British interests might be threatened—in Asia itself, in North Africa, or in south-eastern Europe. Suppose, for example, that the troops in Egypt needed reinforcement: they could, it is hoped, be taken from Palestine. And India could supply the gap thus made.

So far as at this moment can be seen, Palestine will always contain a British garrison. Provision is made in the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty for the ultimate removal of British troops—the question of their occupation, rather, is to be examined by the League of Nations in 1956—but it is improbable that any time factor will appear



in the projected Treaty with Palestine. The links of Great Britain with an independent Palestine will be closer than are her links with any existing independent State.

## CHAPTER V

### TRANS-JORDAN

THE British hold under the same Mandate as that which governs Palestine another and a vastly different land, Trans-Jordan, though with this significant distinction, that to this State east of the River Jordan, the Balfour Declaration does not apply. From the very beginning of the mandatory régime the British have recognised that Trans-Jordan was one of the territories which, under the famous MacMahon Pledges of 1915, should be reserved for independent Arabs. Not a single Jew has been allowed to settle in Trans-Jordan.

To me, Trans-Jordan is one of the most attractive countries in the whole Near East. It is ruled over by the Emir Abdullah, the second son of King Hussein of the Hejaz, who was our ally in the Great War. But it was by a kind of accident that Abdullah came to be overlord in Trans-Jordan. It happened thus. When Faisal, King of Syria, and later the first King of Iraq, was ejected in 1920 by the French from Damascus, his brother,

Abdullah, in the Hejaz, gathered together an army and marched northwards, threatening revenge. The British, however, wanted no more complications with the French commandatories in Western Asia ; they, therefore, offered to Abdullah the throne of Trans-Jordan, for which they had been loosely responsible since the Armistice. The Emir accepted. And the British have never had reason to regret their decision. At any time during the last three years, the people of Trans-Jordan, sympathising deeply with the Arabs of Palestine, might have revolted, and it is largely due to the restraining hand of the Emir that no untoward event has occurred on or from the other side of the Jordan.

Trans-Jordan, in which T. E. Lawrence and his colleagues performed some of their most eminent feats against the Turks, is a much larger land than Palestine. It has not been fully surveyed, but its area is usually given as something over 20,000 square miles, and, though no census has ever been taken, its population is estimated at something between 300,000 and 350,000.

At least two-fifths of this land, however, is desert, and, in all probability, irreclaimable desert. It is a fact worth noting that the

limit of cultivation to-day, when Arabs and British are responsible for Trans-Jordan, is almost exactly the same as it was under the Romans, who certainly extracted what could be extracted from it. The desert lies to the east of the Pilgrim Railway, the railway which before the Great War was constructed from Damascus to Medina to convey faithful Moslems to the Holy Cities of Arabia. To-day, no trains run south of Maan, and the southern desert area of Trans-Jordan lies east of the road from Maan to Aqaba, the southernmost point of the Emirate.

The population of Trans-Jordan (always called T. J. for short) is almost wholly Arab, and of these Arabs all but 20,000, who are Christians, are Moslems. There are, it is true, picturesque communities of Circasians of fighting stock, and other small groups, but they have little formative influence in affairs of State.

But the whole people of Trans-Jordan are warlike. They have never been disarmed, and almost every household, and certainly most of the Bedouin of the desert, has a rifle, even if of antique pattern. To own a gun is almost a matter of self-respect in Trans-Jordan. This is a legacy of former times, when village raided village, and the Bedouin

raided the peasants. Thanks principally to the work of the Arab Legion, a body of Arabs created by Peake Pasha (who retired only this year from the post of Commandant of the Legion which he had held almost since the end of the War), all raiding in Trans-Jordan has stopped. The country is perfectly peaceful, and travellers need not have the slightest fear. So long as they inform the Police—and the Arab Legion is the Police Force of Trans-Jordan—they can go anywhere, even to the wildest parts ; and some parts of Trans-Jordan have been unaltered for thousands of years.

The capital of Trans-Jordan, Amman, is a romantic city set on hills. Here are the headquarters of the Government, the Palace of the Emir Abdullah, and the home of the British Resident. Here also is a squadron of the Royal Air Force. Amman is being steadily modernised, without, however, losing its character. No bazaars such as those of Damascus or even of Jerusalem grace it, and for the tourist who always wishes to take away some memento of a place it may be disappointing. But historically it is so interesting—the Roman amphitheatre, for instance, near which is situated the only hotel in Amman, is fascinating—climatically

it is so bracing, and the journeys to be made thence either to classical towns or to the desert are so quickening, that Amman has many Western admirers.

The two "stock attractions" of Trans-Jordan are the Nabatean city of Petra and the Greco-Roman city of Jerash. Petra is a quite unique place, with its buildings cut out of the coloured rock, rock which when the sun shines on it produces the most original colours. "Rose-red," it is most often called. That it never is; but the hues are almost impossible to describe. At one time, in its heyday, Petra is supposed to have harboured no fewer than 30,000 thriving citizens: to-day it is the home of but 150 indigent Bedouin. In it, as perhaps nowhere else in the world, is it possible to conjure up the sense of past greatness.

Jerash, which has been beautifully restored, is another matter altogether. It is but one, although a very fine, example of Greco-Roman art, and there were other cities like it (it was one of the towns of the Decapolis) in Trans-Jordan.

All over the cultivated part of Trans-Jordan there are numerous remains of conquerors who have come and gone. It teems, for example, with Old Testament history.

After Israelites came Nabateans, Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Turks, and finally the British, and of all of them abundant traces remain. There is possibly no country in the world which would so well repay excavation as Trans-Jordan.

Despite the richness of its history, Trans-Jordan is to-day a poor land. The majority of its inhabitants are agriculturists, growing such things as grapes, grain, and olives. There is also a certain trade in livestock—sheep, cattle, camels, goats, and so on. Industrially, the country is in a very early stage, though there are certain far-sighted Trans-Jordanians only waiting for the co-operation of British capital to develop mineral wealth, which almost certainly exists.

The West has not come with an overwhelming rush to Trans-Jordan, which still conducts its business with the leisure and the dignity of ancient times. Socially, too, the country is bound by the old conventions, and the strict example set by the Emir's Court is closely followed by the mass of the inhabitants. This adherence to Moslem traditions is seen vividly in the treatment of women, who are "kept in their proper place"—which, however, does not mean

that they do not exert a good deal of influence behind the scenes. But, except in the interests of public security and of public health—both boons welcomed by the people at large—there has been no interference by the Mandatory Power in the customs of the population.

For the last eleven years, that is, ever since the Anglo-Trans-Jordan Agreement of 1928, the British, though very tactful and discreet, have kept a fairly tight hold on the administration of the country. In the earliest years of the Emirate the British Adviser had kept the Ruler on a much easier rein, and the results were not felicitous, more especially in the matter of finance. Ever since 1924, however, Trans-Jordan has never been able to forget that it is a mandated territory. And well has it learned its lesson.

So pleased have the British authorities been with the general attitude of Trans-Jordan, and particularly with its restrained attitude during three years of rebellion in Palestine beginning in 1936, that they have this year decided to advance Trans-Jordan along the road to complete independence. The country is to have a Cabinet, each member of which will be in charge of a Department. The Emir will be able to appoint



consular representatives in certain neighbouring countries. Further, he will be able, if finances permit, to raise and maintain military forces. And in several other ways the people of Trans-Jordan will be able to cultivate a sense of responsibility for their own affairs. This advancement has been richly deserved, and in due course, no doubt, Trans-Jordan will enjoy such a degree of independence as is possessed, say, by her eastern neighbour, Iraq.

For some time to come, possibly, Great Britain will have to support Trans-Jordan financially. But it will not be impossible to discover a way of subsidising without controlling. Trans-Jordan owes much to the British, but the British also owe much to Trans-Jordan, which might easily have joined in the Palestine revolt, with effects very embarrassing to Great Britain. She remained steadfast, and her loyalty deserves recognition.

Now it may be asked: Why are the British in Trans-Jordan? Is it not an expensive luxury? Does it serve any strategic purpose?

Primarily, Trans-Jordan acts as a buffer for Palestine and for the Eastern Mediterranean shore. When the Romans were at their

height in Trans-Jordan they built the cities of the Decapolis with the same idea, namely, to keep out the desert, though they also had their eye upon a possible rising by the Jews, then in command of Judea, in Palestine. But to-day the British are in Trans-Jordan on moral as well as strategic grounds. They have no forces there, outside the Royal Air Force, for the Arab Legion (a locally paid force) and the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force (an Imperial force), though having a few British officers, are composed of non-Britons, the first being purely Arab, and the second being a mixture of Asiatics and Africans. Only a handful of British officials exist in Trans-Jordan, and they co-operate most admirably with the Arab population, who certainly would not like their disappearance.

In other words, the British are in Trans-Jordan not only for the good of Palestine but also because the people of Trans-Jordan want them there.

In conclusion, it must be noted that Trans-Jordan has rallied with splendid unanimity to the cause of Britain in the present conflict—a testimony which could not be more eloquent to the esteem in which the Emirate holds the Mandatory Power.



## *PART II*

	per cent.
From Mombasa . . . .	45
From Singapore . . . .	44
From Hong Kong . . . .	37
From Australia . . . .	10

Now, British imports coming via the Suez Canal vary between 9 per cent. and 14 per cent. of the whole. These imports comprise oil from Iran, tin and rubber from Malaya and Netherlands India, and jute, rice, tea, manganese ore, cotton, and oil seeds from British India. Of these commodities the oil from the Persian Gulf is the most important, for it constitutes no less than 18 per cent. of Britain's total import of oil.

In addition to these articles, there are goods coming through the Suez Canal from Australia and East Africa, but all of them, it may be argued, could, if the necessity arose, be sent round the Cape.

There is, further, the traffic in goods which pass through the Mediterranean, though not through the Suez Canal, on their way to Great Britain. There is oil from Rumania, which enters the Mediterranean via the Black Sea and the Dardanelles; there is the oil from Iraq, which enters tankers in the Mediterranean at Haifa in Palestine and

Tripoli in Syria respectively—each of these countries, Rumania and Iraq, accounts for 4 per cent. of the total import of oil in Great Britain. And there is oil from Russia, which constitutes 3 per cent. of our total import of oil.

Among other commodities which could scarcely find their way to England except by the Mediterranean are cotton from Egypt, phosphates and iron ore from French North Africa, and various fruits—grapes, bananas, oranges, dates, olives, and so on.

Is it vital to preserve this trade in time of war? Could it not be done without, or could not much of it successfully reach England by a longer route, the route round South and West Africa? The layman will say at once that the total volume of trade from the Mediterranean is relatively so small that, at a pinch, we could either do without it or get it by some means or other; he may lean, therefore, towards the thesis that, British ships being so vulnerable in the Mediterranean, it would be better to evacuate it in time of war. On this subject the experts differ. The trader in the Mediterranean will say that, though the trade thence to Britain is small, it is vital because it comes at particular seasons of the year, seasons in

which no other countries could supply the goods we need.

Let us examine the case for evacuation of the Mediterranean in time of war.

## CHAPTER VII

### STAY OR RUN ?

THOSE who favour complete or partial abdication by the British of the Mediterranean in time of war maintain that our policy ought to conform to our strategy, and that to be bound by political considerations when it is a matter of life and death is just folly. They adduce the following considerations.

First, they say, remember what happened during the Great War, in which, though we had a hostile Turkey (of no great naval value), Italy was an ally. From the naval point of view the Mediterranean was then Great Britain's blackest spot. No less than 5,000,000 tons of shipping, British, allied or neutral, out of a total of 13,000,000 tons destroyed by enemy action, were lost in the Mediterranean. There the submarine was never wholly conquered. And when, say the critics, attack from above is added to attack from below, the losses to shipping inevitably would be very high, the anti-aircraft guns, the friendly aeroplanes, the predators, the convoy system,



and all the rest of it notwithstanding.

They go on to argue that to try to defend seaborne trade in such an area as the Mediterranean would place on the navies fighting with Great Britain an impossible strain, and one which would seriously militate against those navies' main aim, namely, the winning of a war.

The "Cape School," as those who advocate the relinquishment of the Mediterranean in time of war are called, look upon the possibility of a major naval engagement there with dread. They assert that naval action by the British depends on two vulnerable bases, Gibraltar and Malta, and, putting strategy above political considerations, they would take the Mediterranean Fleet out of the narrow waters that divide Europe from Africa, and employ it where it had room to manœuvre, refusing to fight a battle on "ground" of the enemy's choosing.

Get back, this school says, to the time when all British shipping from and to the East went round the Cape of Good Hope; strengthen the bases in West and South Africa; organise the route that served Great Britain for many years before the Suez Canal was built. And if, they conclude by saying, Great Britain were to win a

war thus envisaged, all the Mediterranean influence would at once return ; if, on the other hand, she lost, not all her activities in the Mediterranean would suffice to keep her Mediterranean possessions.

To this line of argument the "Mediterranean School," that is, those who favour holding on and taking the offensive in the Middle Sea, reply that the adoption in advance of war of such counsel as the "Cape School" advances would greatly increase the chances of war in the Mediterranean, that the abandonment of Malta, for example, and the decreasing of British naval forces in the Mediterranean, might simply result in fostering thoughts of aggrandisement in others who are at present restrained through being able to count the cost.

But apart from purely strategic considerations, the "Mediterranean School" continues, Great Britain is bound to defend such lone strongholds as Egypt and Palestine, and to desert them in time of stress would be unthinkable, honour and interest alike indicating the fulfilling of the British bond.

These rival views, however, have been rendered academic by recent developments. For the grand decision has been made. The

"Mediterranean School" has prevailed. Only recently Great Britain has vastly increased her commitments in the Mediterranean, and has inestimably fortified her position therein, by coming to agreements with Greece and Turkey. Use of the Greek harbours in time of war is essential, but the Anglo-Turkish Agreement is even more vital. The attitude of Turkey towards Britain and France—and despite recent events in eastern Europe that attitude has never been open to doubt—makes the anti-aggression front dominant in the Eastern Mediterranean.

But there are critics whose views lie midway between the "Cape School" and the "Mediterranean School." These admit that the commitments of Great Britain in the Middle Sea should not be neglected in advance of war—commitments which concern, apart from actual British possessions, Egypt and Palestine, and, as just indicated, Greece and Turkey. The course suggested by these critics is that, seeing that the Mediterranean in time of war must be disastrous to merchant shipping, Britain should keep her strategic grip on the route between Gibraltar and the Suez Canal by means of her naval, military, and air forces,

but that the power should be concentrated on this one purpose, and should not be diffused by having to protect merchant vessels, which ought to be barred altogether from the Middle Sea in the event of war.

## CHAPTER VIII

### STRATEGIC ISLANDS

LET us now briefly glance at certain points in Mediterranean strategy. Study the map, see how the sea, once you have entered it by Gibraltar, runs up the east coast of Spain, along southern France, nearly encircles Italy, penetrates into Greece, squeezes through the Dardanelles into the Black Sea, breaks Anatolia into a multitude of inlets, leaves Syria and Palestine with a paucity of natural harbours, and goes round again by the Suez Canal, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco.

Of all this mainland, Spain is the only uncertain factor. There are good judges who predict that in the present war the Spaniards will remain neutral, that, tired of their own civil war, they will place their own needs of regeneration before any other consideration. It may be so: one cannot be sure. For the rest, only Italy and Libya have declared for neutrality; the remaining territories are in friendship either with Great Britain or with Great Britain's

friends, even if the mandated territories of Syria and Palestine might be considered in Nazi quarters as doubtful assets. This fact, seeing that any Mediterranean conflict would be largely a question of bases, is all-important.

But it is not only the Mediterranean mainland which counts: there are the islands. These must be considered in some detail.

First take the Western Mediterranean. Going from west to east we have the Balearic Islands, in the possession of Spain. These control, or could control, the highway between France and her North African territories. This commanding position has been recognised for centuries: the way in which the islands have constantly changed hands is proof of that. They are, moreover, within flying distance of Gibraltar. Few things worried France more, during the recent Spanish war, than the Italian occupation of the island of Majorca.

Then comes the French island of Corsica, in which Napoleon was born, and which the French would never willingly relinquish. It contains three naval bases, San Bonifacio, in the south, Ajaccio, in the west, and Bastia, in the north-east.

Separated by the nine-miles-wide Straits

of San Bonifacio from Corsica is the Italian island of Sardinia. Here are four naval bases, one in the north, Isola delta Maddalena, and three in the south, in Caligari and on two islands, San Pietro and Sant' Antioco.

Both Corsica and Sardinia are well stocked with aeroplanes. Their proud inhabitants could never be surprised, seeing what they do see every day, if war in the Middle Sea were one day to overtake them.

Then take the Central Mediterranean islands, Sicily, Malta, and Pantellaria. The sea between Sicily, Europe, and Cape Bon, Africa is but 75 miles wide : it is the Mediterranean's bottle-neck. Whoever commands these straits is in a position to control the waters both to the westward and to the eastward. And in the middle of these straits lies the Italian island of Pantellaria.

But a word first on Sicily. From the high land of this Italian island Malta can be seen ; it is only 70 miles away. Everyone knows that it is very heavily fortified ; at the time of the 1935 crisis, consequent upon the strain between Italy and England over the Abyssinian affair, it was reported to be "stiff" with aeroplanes. The offensive potentialities of Sicily are indeed very great.

Of Malta enough has been written in the preceding pages, but here it may be reiterated that the island would not contemplate a merely placid role in time of war ; it might receive trouble, it would certainly give it.

Much less known than either Sicily or Malta is the rock known as Pantellaria. Prior to 1935, very few people had even heard of it. It is a volcanic island, fertile enough, but with no grass. Formerly it was a criminal colony. No large boats can be accommodated there, for the entrance to the harbour, which is small, is shallow. But as a submarine base it appears to be ideal. About four years ago Italy began to improve its anchorages, to fortify it, and to use its lake as an air base. Incidentally, they prohibited foreign aeroplanes from flying in the area. Should war in the Mediterranean ever break out, Pantellaria would be a name in the news far more frequently than it is now.

Finally, there are the islands of the Eastern Mediterranean. Here can be mentioned only the most important of them, for they are very numerous. Beautiful, poetic places they are, in which it seems a crime even to think of their being involved in war.

Of most of them Greece is the mother, and they have Greek names. On the west



are the Ionian Islands, returned by England to Greece in 1863. The chief and richest of these islands is Corfu. The gratitude of the Greeks to England for the rendition of this island is lively, and its inhabitants still sing the praises of Gladstone, who recommended its return to Greece. Whenever a British man-of-war has visited it—and the British sailor is the most popular British visitor to Greece—there has been the most cordial welcome conceivable.

The large island of Crete did not become Greek until 1913, and its inhabitants are very apt to be "agin the Government." That does not mean, however, that they would lend themselves to any foreign propaganda. Far from it. During the 1938 crisis their leading men, bitterly hostile to the Government of General Metaxas in Athens, spontaneously came forward in support of the mainland: at the breath of danger from without they closed their ranks. In Crete is the magnificent harbour of Suda Bay, well known to British ships. Protected by Cape Acrotiri, Suda Bay can shelter a very large number of vessels in any kind of weather.

Eastwards, a little to the north of Crete, are the former Greek islands, now Italian, of Rhodes and the Dodecanese. Here, perhaps,

the Italians have made their most spectacular island efforts. They have transformed the islands, modernised them, and, to Rhodes at least, have attracted tourists. Thousands of pounds they have spent on restoration of ancient monuments, and, in general, their expenditure on cultural matters has here been prodigious. In few places better than in the Dodecanese can the Italian genius for renovation be appreciated. It is as if the Italians had felt specially here the artistic legacy of ancient Rome.

It is, however, in the strategic possibilities of these islands that the Italians have surpassed themselves. Strong naval bases exist in Rhodes, Leros, and Astro Palia ; an even stronger air base is at Leros ; and all three islands are very heavily fortified. Only fairly recently several thousands of Italian soldiers are reported to have been sent to Rhodes, and there is no question that these islands play a large part in Italy's strategic ideas.

This intensive development of the Dodecanese is the more striking by contrast with what has taken place, or has not taken place, in Cyprus, the possibilities of which have been touched upon in earlier pages.

Lastly must be mentioned two Greek islands, Samothrace and Lemnos, and two Turkish islands, Imbros and Tenedos, which command the entrance to the Dardanelles. These were extensively used by the British Navy during the Great War. Since then, Turkey has fortified her islands, but Greece, relying on her friendship with Turkey, has not troubled to do so.

The overriding consideration about all these islands in the Eastern Mediterranean which are not in Italian hands is that they would be at the disposal of the fleets of the friends of Turkey and of Greece, and the same remark also applies to harbours on the mainland. From the naval point of view, Great Britain's diplomatic cultivation of the goodwill of Turkey and of Greece is of inestimable advantage.

## CHAPTER IX

### NORTHERN AFRICA

THERE exists a tendency, in any discussion of Mediterranean problems, to concentrate on their European aspect, and to exclude, or at least to minimise, the importance of African participation. Northern Africa is indeed of paramount significance in this connection, partly because of the naval and air bases which exist therein, partly because it would unquestionably and most actively be involved in war, if war in the Mediterranean were to come, and partly because of the bearing of popular sentiment in it on the whole problem.

Let us glance at this North African shore, going from west to east. There is Spanish Morocco, which means, or is summed up in, one thing: Ceuta. Ceuta is the southern Pillar of Hercules. Its strategic position, facing Gibraltar, is obvious. It is a strongly fortified naval base, and there seems no disposition whatever on the part of the Spaniards to relinquish it, or of other Powers to disinterest themselves in it.

Now what is the sentiment of Spanish Morocco? Capital has been made out of the fact that its sons, the warlike Moors, devout Moslems, were largely utilised by General Franco for the triumph of "Christianity" over the forces of "red atheism." But these Moors were no unwilling tools of their coercing overlords: they liked the money they got and the loot. But, though they fought well, these Moorish soldiers have certainly enlarged their horizons. Spanish Morocco, be it remembered, is not an integral part of Spain (as Algeria, for example, is an integral part of France): it is a protectorate run by Spaniards in the name of the Sultan of Morocco. The Moors may ask for local autonomy, and possibly the Spaniards, holding on to certain strategic points, might not be averse from granting it. This would promote international complications, for not only would the international status of Tangier be involved, but also the whole problem of the vastly greater French Morocco. Germany, Italy, France, and Great Britain are all vitally interested in the future of Spanish Morocco, a future which seems most uncertain.

When we get to French Morocco, however, we are on much solidier ground. Unlike

the Spaniards, the French in Morocco have worked with single-minded energy. Millions of pounds they have spent in developing it, on both Atlantic and Mediterranean sides. It is a French protectorate, ruled over by the Sultan, but so discreet have the French been that the loyalty of the Moroccans can be relied upon: they, like their brothers in Algeria and Tunisia, have recently given quite spontaneous expression to their preference for France over any other Power, and there is no question that they identify their interests with those of France.

So far as sentiment is concerned, much the same remark applies to Algeria and Tunisia: foreign intrigue on these two territories stands no chance of any wide success. Both the Algerians and the Tunisians freely criticise the French, but at the first sign of trouble they close their ranks. In Tunis is the famous base of Bizerta, the terminal of the line to Toulon on which all French naval strategy in the Western Mediterranean is based. This, together with the newer part of Mers-el-Kebir, near Oran, in Algeria, is at the disposal of British as well as French vessels in time of war, and of the former base, in particular, it is anticipated

that British ships would make full use.

Eastward of Tunisia lies Italian Libya. No very fertile part of North Africa is this stretch, but Italian colonists have worked with a will to transform the wilderness. In many places they have succeeded, even if they occasionally pine for the richer soil of their fatherland. Nowhere has Italy's engineering skill been more noticeable than in this desert territory, which, of course, formed part of the old Roman Empire. She has naval bases at Tripoli, Benghazi, and Tobruk. She has constructed roads, irrigation works (though the country is largely waterless) and wells, and she is colonising it with some success. It is very strongly fortified indeed, and is regarded by Italians as a ground from which either Egypt or Tunisia might be attacked. But it has to be remembered that an attack over such a desert, against enemies who are by no means unprepared, presents most formidable difficulties. It is one thing to make a dash with mechanical transport over waterless country, but a very different thing to make a massed invasion.

Of Egypt it is only necessary to say here that it is heart and soul with Great Britain in any crisis that could arise from control of

the Mediterranean. Under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty emergency clauses thousands of British troops have recently been poured into Egypt, and this with every sign of goodwill from the Egyptian people. The fullest use is being, and will be, accorded of the harbour of Alexandria, whither, it will be recalled, the Mediterranean Fleet went when it left Malta during the critical period of 1935. The Egyptian authorities are most anxious to make their country strong; in the meantime, they rely heavily on Great Britain.



## CHAPTER X

### BRITISH INTERESTS

THAT there are definite British interests in the Mediterranean is patent to any observer, and they have three distinct aspects—commercial, political, and Imperial. But it is not possible precisely to localise them, for they, in their turn, impinge upon or derive from or overlap interests in other spheres than the Mediterranean. They cannot be dissociated, for example, from the British position in Europe, or, even more obviously, from the British position in the Middle East, that is, in all the Asiatic countries west of India. Actually, and to speak loosely, it may be said that the Mediterranean is a microcosm of British interests, which, however, cannot be fully understood without reference to their larger setting.

Enough has been written in the preceding pages to indicate that, during the nineteenth century, Great Britain was supreme in the Mediterranean, though nobody has suggested that she abused her position. On the contrary, she did much to cleanse the Middle

Sea of elements that would have rendered peaceful shipping precarious. As for political intervention in that sea, there need only be recalled the British leadership at Navarino in 1827 which made the independence of Greece possible, and the benevolent intervention of the British fleet when Garibaldi made his famous expedition to Sicily and Naples—this facilitated the union of Italy.

This record of Great Britain as the guardian of freedom and the foe of tyranny everywhere in the Mediterranean must be remembered. The rivalry that has arisen since is not the result of any change in attitude on her part, but comes directly from new-born ambitions in other Powers.

A change first became noticeable in 1912. In that year Italy made war on Turkey in the provinces of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (now called Libya), and, defeating the Ottomans, seized also Rhodes and the Dodecanese, in the Eastern Mediterranean. But Italy then gave not a thought to challenging the position of already established Powers in the Mediterranean, and thus she proved by fighting on the Allied side from 1915 to 1918. Her arguments, in the early months of the last war, for supporting Britain and France,

are still extremely interesting to study.

In 1912 Germany, not Italy, was England's preoccupation, and in that year it was decided that British naval strength should be concentrated in the North Sea, while French naval strength was concentrated in the Mediterranean.

During the Great War the Allies, though suffering immense losses from German submarines in the Mediterranean, held their position—witness the various campaigns in the Dardanelles, Egypt, Palestine, Salonika, and so on.

After the Great War it was Great Britain's wish to maintain the *status quo* in the Mediterranean. For several years that wish was gratified, and so complacent did the situation appear that British forces in that sea were considerably reduced. A rude awakening came in 1935, when Italy began her invasion of Ethiopia and showed unmistakably that the waters of the Mediterranean might be stirred up in that process. To attain the conquest of Abyssinia two things above all were necessary: free passage through the Suez Canal and uninterrupted imports of oil. Were either of these threatened by members of the League of Nations, Italy declared that she would let

loose a world war. As everyone knows, the international conditions concerning the Suez Canal were faithfully observed, and oil was not included in the list of "sanctions" imposed by the League. Italy won the Abyssinian War: and the Mediterranean situation has been uncertain ever since.

The new Italian position must be understood. The Italian Empire has in the Mediterranean at once its greatest strength and its greatest weakness.

It need construct naval vessels suitable only to Mediterranean needs; hence Italy has specialised in the swift and light variety, capable of making lightning dashes and as quickly moving off. In the Mediterranean, also, Italy has numerous points which she has brilliantly converted into naval and air bases. No one can deny that she could make things extremely unpleasant for any enemy in the Middle Sea.

But her own possessions are not such that she could hope alone to win a war in the Mediterranean. Hence her cultivation of Spain, and the threat implied to the French and British strategical positions.

Italy's main internal effort during recent years has been directed to making herself self-supporting in time of war. Much has

been accomplished in this direction, but the attempt can never wholly succeed. For in war materials she is self-sufficient only in sulphur, aluminium, mercury, and nitrates ; she has little coal, iron, copper, or potash ; she has no oil (except a very small amount from her latest possession, Albania), cotton, rubber, or phosphates ; and a considerable part of her foodstuffs, particularly meat and fish, comes from abroad.

Without the free transit of trade through the Mediterranean, in fact, Italy would be lost : no less than 86 per cent. of her imports come by sea, and between 60 and 70 per cent. come through the Straits of Gibraltar.

At each end of the Mediterranean, in the Atlantic and in the Indian Ocean, stands Great Britain, and the fear that England might close up these ends is ever present in Italy.

It is in this light that the Anglo-Italian Agreement of April, 1938, by which arrangements were made, among other things, to respect the *status quo* in the Mediterranean and to withdraw Italian forces from Spain when a settlement of the Spanish question had been reached, should be viewed. This Agreement appeared to decrease the tension that had arisen between London and Rome,

but until the ultimate intentions of Italy, on which there is considerable controversy, are unequivocally known, it may be wise not to overlook the possibility of stormy weather in the Mediterranean. When Mr. Neville Chamberlain, accompanied by Lord Halifax, paid his historic visit to Rome, he remembered to take his umbrella.

Let us then sum up British interests in the Mediterranean. They have undergone various phases, according to the rise and fall of various enemies of the British Empire. At one time the commercial interest, especially the Levant trade, was dominant ; at another time the political interest, especially in the time of Napoleon, was paramount ; and to-day, Imperial interests are added to commercial and political interests. The sea-routes and the land-routes to the Persian Gulf, to India and beyond, must be left open. This is a resolve which no British Government, of whatever political complexion, will renounce, and while it endures, Great Britain will be in the Mediterranean.

## CHAPTER XI

### BASE OF THE BRITISH FLEET

IN the chapter on Malta it was indicated that in time of war the British Fleet in the Mediterranean might not be able to use the island which has been its base for more than a hundred years. Whither would it go? To this there is at present only one possible answer: Alexandria. Unerringly that imposing Egyptian harbour was selected in the critical days of 1935, when the Italian mood was very dangerous, and unquestionably it would again be selected as the main home of the British Fleet.

The more the potentialities of the situation are considered, the more vital does the importance of Alexandria appear. It will have to be defended at all costs, whether the threat come from troops from Libya, or from the air, or, more improbably, from the sea. I have even heard distinguished naval authorities maintain that the protection of Alexandria merits more men than does home defence, the argument being that it is quite possible for Great Britain to win a war in the

Mediterranean, whereas passive defence at home can contribute only negatively to the desired end.

That the British Government and the Egyptian Government, between whom there exists a treaty which provides, *inter alia*, for the use of Alexandria by the British Fleet, are fully alive to the aspect of the Mediterranean, is not open to doubt.

No other comparable harbour exists. French, Greek, and Turkish bases are good, but none of them could serve the British as can Alexandria. Haifa, by virtue of its being in mandated territory, cannot be fortified as a base beyond the requirements of Palestine itself, and facilities at Cyprus are as yet scanty ; necessarily, therefore, the British must use a foreign base.

Happily, however, Alexandria need not be looked upon as " foreign." For the Egyptians are heart and soul with the British, potentially menaced as they are by the imponderable forces in the war which, at the moment of writing, are not clearly defined. The stronger the British forces either on their mainland or off their shores, the better are the Egyptians pleased. They now realise that the architects of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Treaty designed well, and



though some may for a time have thought that the military clauses of that Treaty bore hardly on them, they to-day perceive that without British strength they might be irrevocably lost.

Hence it is with the utmost goodwill that Egypt lends, and will continue to lend, Alexandria for the use of the British.

## CHAPTER XII

### STRATEGY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

IF the present war in Europe were to spread southwards, the Mediterranean would at once become the most arresting of all theatres, for therein quicker results would probably emerge than in any other sphere of fighting. Suppose Italy were hostile. She, whose possessions in Africa, unless she can dominate the Mediterranean, are virtually hostages to fortune, would strive with might and main to preserve contact with Libya and Abyssinia, neither of which of themselves can suffice to keep the Italian garrisons going. Italy undoubtedly would wish to make a dash with mechanical forces on Egypt, even over the waterless deserts that separate Libya from the land of the Nile. Alternatively she might try to push westwards against Tunisia. But Tunisia is ready, and could, indeed, lend invaluable aid, by advancing on the Italians in the rear, if an attack on Egypt were made.

Italian aircraft from Italy itself, from Libya, and from the Dodecanese would

strive to render Malta untenable and ceaselessly to bomb Alexandria. Any base, in fact, that the enemies of Italy might possess, is within comparatively easy reach of Italian bombers.

But those who say that a war in the interests of freedom and international decency could be won in the Mediterranean have a good deal to show for their line of argument. Should no other Power than those at present engaged in hostilities be involved, France would be in charge of the Western Mediterranean and Great Britain would be in charge of the Eastern Mediterranean. Between them, and with the aid of their friends, they could surely preserve intact their influence in the Middle Sea.

There is no need to emphasise the possibilities of such a position. It is scarcely conceivable, indeed, that any territory now friendly to Britain and France would change hands.

It has to be remembered, above all, that Italy, whom so many people regarded, wrongly, as the pliable tool of Berlin, has declared for neutrality—a decision which is patently in accordance with the present mood of the Italian people. Italy has undoubtedly a great role to play in inter-

national affairs, and it is within her power to exercise a decisive influence on the future of civilisation. She, unlike certain regions in the east and north of Europe, has known intimately the civilising hand of ancient Rome, and her diplomacy may be relied upon to make the most of what elements of sanity are left in the world.

In short, those who predicate that in a war in the Mediterranean the initiative would inevitably lie with the agents of Berlin are likely to be rudely falsified. True, there is little but guesswork to go upon in estimating the effect of fast-diving bombers upon warships, but it is certain that anti-aircraft weapons have improved out of all recognition in recent years. Some experts declare indeed that the zenith of the bombing aeroplane has already passed. Be that as it may it is certain that the British and French fleets in the Mediterranean would not in time of war play any passive role. Their offensive power is enormous, and even if naval authorities are inclined, naturally, perhaps, to depreciate the shattering effect of hostile aircraft, and, too, of hostile submarines—so confident are they in their "detecting" machines—it is quite certain that the Nelson spirit is not dead and would be witnessed

again in that Middle Sea which has seen more naval battles than any other sea in the world.

### CHAPTER XIII

## THE MIDDLE EAST "STRATEGIC RESERVE"

DESPITE the possession of Gibraltar, at the western end, and of Malta, in the centre, it is the Eastern Mediterranean which to-day holds the most immediate interest for Great Britain. This is so, not only because there are such vast British interests in the hinterland of these eastern waters, but also because Great Britain has made Egypt the junction of her air routes to the Far East and to Africa. The "Clapham Junction" of Imperial Airways is at Alexandria, whence the line to the Cape goes southwards, and that to India and beyond goes eastwards. In time of war, Imperial Airways obviously cannot adhere to their present line, which crosses France, Italy, and Greece before traversing the Mediterranean, but it would not give up the attempt to get into the Eastern Mediterranean.

The military position of Great Britain in that part of the world has been immensely strengthened in recent times, and an admir-



ably elastic plan has been evolved for fortifying the garrisons of any threatened spot. In March 1939 the Secretary of State for War spoke illuminatingly on Strategic Reserves, and in particular he said : " In the current year the nucleus of an additional Strategic Reserve in the Middle East was formed, at present included in the two divisions stationed in Palestine. . . . The Middle East was a separate force, freed from the necessity of drawing on our home resources. It would thus have its own reserves and be held for use anywhere within the radius of our interests in that part of the world."

In supplying men for any part threatened in the Eastern Mediterranean area, India might be expected to play a notable part. During the Palestine disturbances that began in 1936 troops were called in from places as far from each other as Malta and India.



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE ANGLO-TURKISH AGREEMENT

A FEW years ago, when the issue of war in the Mediterranean was in the balance as a result of the imposition of "sanctions" upon Italy and of the threat from Rome that she was ready to challenge the forces of the League, Great Britain speedily came to an understanding with certain countries, such as Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia, which abut on the Mediterranean or on neighbouring seas. But these were temporary arrangements, designed for a specific purpose. With the winning by Italy of the Abyssinian war they lapsed. But the goodwill towards Britain had been shown, and later, with the general threat to world peace, was to be crystallised in a new and more permanent form.

Early in 1939 the British gave a guarantee to Poland, Rumania, and Greece. Between Greece and this country there had long been traditional friendship, and no visitors were so welcome to Greece as the British sailors

who constantly enjoyed the hospitality of Greek ports.

But this guarantee to Greece (which, if only through *force majeure*, had fought with the Allies during the Great War) was altogether eclipsed in importance by the subsequent Agreement with Turkey, who had fought against the Allies during the Great War. This Agreement, there is reason to believe, considerably dismayed the Nazi leaders. And well it might. For it radically alters the whole position in the Eastern Mediterranean. The naval and air forces of the Turks may, comparatively speaking, be negligible, but her army is a superb weapon, which could easily master any positions asked of it in western Asia or south-east Europe. Turkish counsels dominate western Asia as they dominate the Balkans, and it is not for nothing that the other members of the Middle Eastern Pact (Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan) and of the Balkan Pact (Yugoslavia, Rumania, and Greece) look up to Turkey as the senior partner.

The innumerable harbours at Turkey's command, moreover, will be at the disposal of the British Fleet, and this, at a time when lightning dashes may be the order of the day, is a tremendous asset.

But it is also through her command of the Dardanelles that Turkey's adhesion to any alliance becomes so important. She can, if she will, prevent or allow any ship getting to or from the Black Sea. Take an example of what this means. Suppose that the Mediterranean is closed to, say Italy, by Britain's blocking the entrances west of Gibraltar and in the Indian Ocean. Italy wants oil, and in time of war would increasingly want it. She could obtain it only from Rumania or from Russia. And even then it would have to come through the Dardanelles, held by a hostile Turkey. However much oil Italy may have stored against a possible war, she cannot possibly have saved enough to last long, especially when the distances between Italy and the Italian Empire are considered.

Rumania, however, would not consent to give Italy oil in time of war, unless she had already been overrun by Germany.

Much, therefore, of what was hoped for from a successful Dardanelles expedition in 1915, is already present on the side of the Allied Powers in the event of another war. It is an asset the value of which cannot be over-emphasised.

Yet this inestimable asset has not fallen

to Great Britain through any cajolery on her part, nor through any pressure. Modern Turkey is not a nation to be cajoled or pressed. She knows her own interests, and these, so far as the Mediterranean is concerned, she identifies wholly with British interests. For years she has been suspicious of Italian intentions—far more so, incidentally, than of German intentions—and the occupation of Albania was to her the last straw. With no obsession for any "ideological school," with no sentimentality, Turkey has appraised the situation. And, without a murmur of internal opposition, without a suspicion of uncertainty about the rightness of her policy, she has made a long-term agreement with Great Britain.

Her decision sent, so to speak, a tidal wave of relief into the tideless Mediterranean, scarcely one of whose occupants but felt that her resolve had helped to solidify the situation, or, if it could not avert a catastrophe, at least implied that such a catastrophe could end in only one way.

## CHAPTER XV

### GERMANY'S INTEREST

IN nearly all discussion upon the possibility of war in the Mediterranean, it is assumed that it is primarily Italy, with her dreams of creating a new Roman Empire, comprising not only the Mediterranean islands but also considerable stretches of Western Asia and North Africa, who might endeavour forcibly to upset the *status quo*. As it was Italy who by her invasion of Abyssinia threw off the scales from British eyes, so, it is alleged, it will be Italy, if anyone, who may fling down the challenge for supremacy in the Middle Sea.

But the interest of Germany, insatiably hungry, must not be overlooked. For several years now her commercial men have quietly penetrated into Spain, towards the Adriatic, and, most notably, along that pre-war line which leads through the Balkan countries and Turkey to Baghdad, the Persian Gulf, and India. Already, and to some extent at Italy's expense, she dominates the markets of south-eastern Europe,

and no one denies that German trade and politics go hand in hand.

Much of this commercial activity is quite legitimate. We must be fair. Germany badly needs the produce which the Balkans can supply, and indubitably she has given to the Balkans some of the manufactured goods of which they are in need. But illegitimate as well as legitimate methods have been applied in order to get an economic stranglehold on the Balkans, and the numbers of German political emissaries in Near and Middle Eastern countries are not so negligible as to substantiate the thesis that trade is the only thing sought by Berlin. In Yugoslavia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, and even as far as India, German agents have been ceaselessly working to undermine the faith of the native peoples in their friends.

To suggest that Germany has appeared in any very dangerous political role on the Mediterranean would be extravagant, but enough has been guessed of her ultimate intentions to make all the Mediterranean peoples, with the exception of the Italians and the Spaniards, rally round the cause of the Powers, Great Britain and

France, that stand in the way of aggression.

It has been hinted that an arrangement was reached by the Axis Powers whereby Germany was to have a free hand in eastern and south-eastern Europe and Italy was to have a free hand in the Mediterranean. But whether or not such an arrangement was ever made, it probably no longer exists.

Herr Hitler is commonly supposed to have reached the Napoleonic stage, and not all Napoleon's victories on the continent of Europe deterred him from dreaming of and attempting conquests in Africa and in Asia. Buonaparte was thwarted by the British in Egypt and in Palestine, and—who knows?—it may be that those same two countries may play a decisive role in the conflict that has been precipitated by Berlin.

Germany has had spectacular commercial triumphs in the Near East, and she has created a degree of awe, though not of admiration, in certain disaffected communities bordering on the Mediterranean. But economic and financial action by the democracies will arrest these triumphs, and the more clearly it is shown that the *status quo* in the Middle Sea will be defended to the utmost, the more vigorously will the states bordering on it seek to find other markets for

their goods than Germany, and the more wholeheartedly will they throw in their hand with Powers who have never exercised tyrannically their command of the Mediterranean.

Certainly Germany's distant eye is on the Mediterranean : it is for the Great Powers who are uniting the world against aggression to see that it does not become an hypnotic stare.



## CHAPTER XVI

### FRANCE AND ITALY

MOST of this book is devoted to looking at affairs in the Mediterranean directly from the British angle. But even if the relations between Great Britain and Germany—and it is only from Germany that any ruffling of the waters of the inland sea is likely to come—were perfect, the position would still be unsatisfactory if relations between Italy and any of Britain's closest friends needed regulating. The position is unsatisfactory, and largely on account of the campaign which Italy maintains (the steam is sometimes shut off but anon is turned on again) against France.

Before Herr Hitler, violating even his own words, poured his legions on Poland and so began one of the most wicked wars in history, German propagandists had been busy trying to sow discord between Great Britain and France. This attempt to "divide and rule" was transparent, and it has miserably failed. Britain and France are closer to-day than they have ever been since the Great War, and any threat to France is equally a

threat to England. No one in recent times could insult France without insulting England, and vice versa. The reactions of London and Paris to intrigue from without were almost identical ; to-day, there is not an atom of difference.

French collaboration with the British in the Mediterranean is essential, and this through the whole sea. Predominantly French interests are in the Western Mediterranean, for the route between French North Africa and France itself must at all costs be kept open ; but the existence of French interests in the Eastern Mediterranean, in Syria, in the Suez Canal, in Jibouti, in fact in the whole route from France to French Indo-China, is not to be overlooked.

It has been suggested that certain claims on French territory, made before the war, really implied the making of Jibouti into a free port, with more rights for Italy on the French-owned railway from that port to Addis Ababa, capital of Abyssinia, a say in the affairs of the Suez Canal Company, towards the revenues of which Italy has, as a consequence of her capture of Abyssinia, to pay more heavily than ever before, and a regularisation of the portion of her nationals in Tunisia. It seems an original way of

asking concessions from a proud and sensitive nation : the circumlocutory methods of the bazaar are not appreciated in Western Europe, where the mediæval notion of a " just price " is not entirely forgotten.

In 1935, it will be remembered, before the outbreak of the Abyssinian war, Italy did accomplish a deal with France. Signor Mussolini persuaded M. Laval, then French Prime Minister, to part with an island or two in the Red Sea, some 2,000 shares in the Jibouti-Addis Ababa railway, and to come to an understanding on the future of Italian nationals in Tunisia. He took the islands and the railway shares, and France got—nothing. Since the Abyssinian War, however, during which France, *qua* member of the League of Nations, took her part in imposing " sanctions " upon Italy, the Italian claims have been considerably advanced. Nor is it probable that the neutrality which Italy has declared in the present war implies the renunciation of these desires. Far from it. The Duce has kept the issue of his country's claims on France open in a rather puzzling way, so that it is very difficult to know at any given time whether he really wants them settled, and what guarantees he would be prepared to give of recognising any

adjustments as a final and definite settlement.

That Great Britain would like to see a settlement of the Italian-French differences is not open to doubt, but France is perfectly well able to look after her own interests in this matter. She understands, perhaps better than Britons, the ebullitions of the Latin temperament, and is disposed to treat the absurdly extravagant claims made by young Italians with witty comment rather than with heated rejoinder. The serenity of her attitude on this matter is most impressive: there is not a trace of fear in it.

Still, while sores remain there is always the chance, in these days of controlled newspapers and official propaganda, of their becoming festering cankers. It would be well if, without any detriment to the French strategical position in the Mediterranean and neighbouring seas, these differences could be regulated.

Italy undoubtedly thought a year or two ago that France, torn by internal dissensions, was finished: Germany entertained a similar notion of Great Britain. Germany is to suffer a rude awakening. As far as the Mediterranean is concerned, it is certain that if and when regulation of Italo-French differences is achieved, no weakening in the

French position will result. France knows Italy far better than Italy knows France.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE ISLAMIC FRINGE

DESPITE the fact that the disposition of European forces in the Mediterranean is, in a consideration of the possibility of war, the most important factor, quite certainly the attitude of the inhabitants of its eastern and southern shores is of the utmost significance. Were they hostile to the plans of the Europeans who fain would utilise their lands in the event of emergency, the whole strategy of the Mediterranean would be seriously impaired.

Now this eastern and southern fringe is predominantly Moslem, and apart from independent Egypt and Italian Libya and Spanish Morocco it is wholly under the influence of Powers opposed to violent action. Can the Islamic peoples in the areas indicated be seduced from their present inclinations ?

This question has not been neglected by either Germany or France. Germany, indeed, had a precedent for action towards the Moslems. So long ago as 1898 the ex-

Kaiser Wilhelm visited Syria and Palestine to declare himself the friend of all Islam. His eyes at that time were on the lands between the Mediterranean and India. The impression he created was not profound. Nearly forty years later Signor Mussolini went one better. Holding erect a sword (shaped, incidentally, in the form of a Cross) he pronounced himself, in Libya, to be the "Protector of Islam."

But the Moslems, like all peoples which have lost their independence, have long memories. The Irish peasant-woman who even to-day can call down curses on the name of Cromwell has many a counterpart in the land of Islam. They had not forgotten the woes of their brethren in Syria and Palestine, at French and British hands respectively, and they may not have shown overmuch grief over the conquest of Abyssinia, a predominantly Moslem country for long ruled over by a Christian dynasty: but they remember most vividly the ruthless suppression by Italy in Libya itself of Moslem liberties. The occupation of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica was carried out by the Italians with appalling severity, and refugees thence to lands under British and French influence did not minimise the

sufferings of those who resisted the Italian onslaught.

The Moslems well know who are their most abiding friends. It was significant that those in French North Africa spontaneously rallied to the cause of France when she appeared threatened; and even the Arabs of Palestine have never given a thought to the idea that under other tutelage than that of the British they might have an easier time.

Yet the German propaganda among the Moslem peoples of the Mediterranean continues, by broadcasts in Arabic, by printed propaganda, by subsidised newspapers, by bribing agents. Hope obviously has not been relinquished that a prodigal expenditure of money may discover enough prodigal sons to upset the "happy family" of Anglo-French-Islamic community of interests. Such methods, however, can be both countered and surpassed, and there is no question that, whatever temporary inconvenience may be caused by this German propaganda among Moslems—for example, the agitation consequent upon the recent death of King Ghazi in Iraq—it will in the long run be defeated.

Admittedly the Palestine question has



been greatly responsible for any hopes among the enemies of Britain that their soft words would find ready ears. These hopes already have crashed to the ground. The Moslems in western Asia and northern Africa are perfectly capable of judging upon their own interests, and no considerable number of them will ever consent to be the tools of Berlin.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### IMPORTANCE OF A PEACEFUL PALESTINE

IN the British Mediterranean colonies there is no political problem the difficulties of which have an effect outside those colonies, but in the mandated territory of Palestine a very different question arises. Extra-Palestinian communities and territories are definitely involved. This is no place for a discussion on the rights and wrongs of this burning question, which has remained unsolved since the inception of the Mandate: earlier in this book has been given some indication of the way in which the British hope to solve it.

What I wish to emphasise here is the fact that, if the British want security in the Mediterranean for the sake of their Imperial position, a just and early solution of Palestine is imperative. They have no chinks in their political armour which can compare with the weakness that arises from their handling of the Arabs in Palestine. From the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, through-

out the length and breadth of the Moslem world, the conduct of affairs in Palestine has been accounted by Moslems a reproach to the British. Anti-British agents certainly have fanned the flames of indignation, but this indignation antedated the exhortations of German-subsidised or other emissaries. Could only the problem of the Holy Land be resolved, the British would have nothing to fear from the Islamic peoples, with whom they have been in long and mutually profitable partnership.

The course has been suggested that the British should rely, for the integrity of Palestine, not on a contented countryside, but on the right arm of the 450,000 Jews who are there. The Jews, it is claimed, must always be loyal to Great Britain, since they could not possibly be on the side of Britain's adversaries.

Such counsel is patently dangerous: to adopt it might be disastrous. Consider the potentialities. The Jews in Palestine, entering it under the protection of the Mandatory Power, have not troubled to make friends with the native population—on the contrary, they have generally been content to treat them as passively or actively hostile; or at best as an obstacle to progress which

had to be suffered. Were the Jews in Palestine to be armed in Britain's defence, every Arab in Palestine, and, too, the Arabs in adjoining countries, would regard it as an affront : it would set the Arab world ablaze.

I am not writing here of the ethics of the problem, but am considering it in terms of pure expediency. There are a thousand aspects to the Palestine question, which has repercussions, one might say, throughout the whole world : justice, honour, prestige, faithfulness, interests immediate and remote—all these and many other factors have been taken into account by the British Government in formulating its policy. And the factor of expediency has not been neglected.

How intensively the sore of Palestine has been fed by the critics of Britain, particularly by Italians and Germans catering for an Arabic-speaking public, scarcely needs emphasis. Herr Hitler has often referred to it in his speeches as an example of British ineptitude, and the Italians have fervently preached (their own practice in this regard is another matter) the desirability of Arab independence. If there were no problem in Palestine, if the Arabs were contented there, it is not too much to say that the

Arabic broadcasts from Berlin and Bari would be so much waste of time and money, but until tranquillity reigns in the Holy Land, Germans will continue to hope for a weakening of the basis of Anglo-Moslem friendship.

Will the British Government's policy for Palestine succeed? Unless it does, none can consider the Mediterranean safe for Great Britain. The chances are that it may, despite the lingering on of terrorism in Palestine. The Arabs admittedly have not secured all that they asked for in the conferences in London, but it is beyond a doubt that their basic fear, namely, that of being swamped numerically by the Jewish immigrants, will be removed. Once realisation of this removal has sunk deeply into the consciousness of the mass of the Palestinians, there may be a renewed access of goodwill towards Great Britain.

In any case, experiment in the new policy will be firmly made. Despite pusillanimous wobbling in the past, the British Government is resolved this time to see the thing through. It is committed to it, and there can be no retreat now without disastrous consequences.

Historians will probably judge that the

new policy came just in time, that it effectively spiked the guns of those Powers which asserted that Great Britain was tied hand and foot to the Jews and in deference to them was prepared to jettison its traditional friendship with Islam. A vast difference will make itself felt in the Moslem lands that border the Mediterranean. Whether or not Great Britain would have acted as she is now doing towards Palestine had the international situation not been so obscure is for present purposes irrelevant: the all-important fact is that she has given to the Moslem world the opportunity to realise that it has no friend to compare with the British.

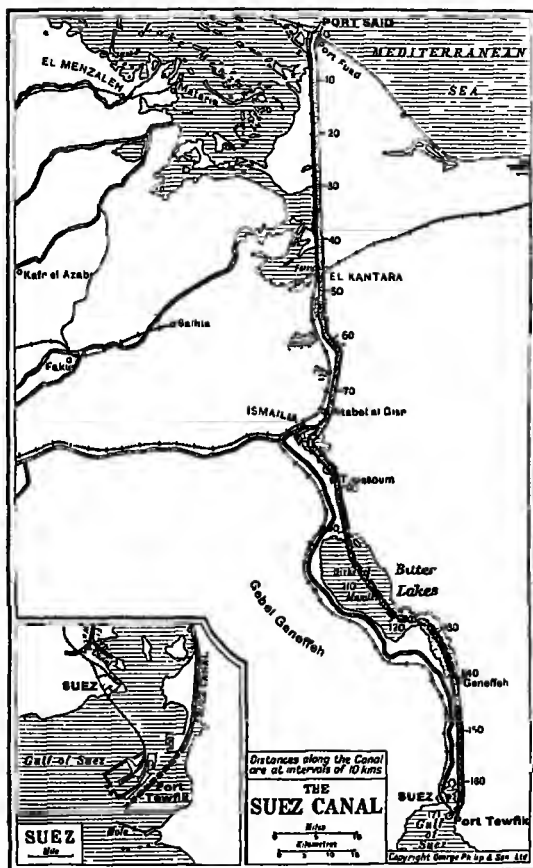
In conclusion, it is most heartening to record the expressions of loyalty, made by both Arabs and Jews, towards Great Britain in the fight between tyranny and freedom.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE SUEZ CANAL

To discuss the problems of the British in the Mediterranean without some separate reference to the significance of the Suez Canal is as if one were to play "Hamlet" without the Prince. For though the Mediterranean was the world's most important sea for centuries before the Canal was even thought of, the construction of a waterway from Port Said to Suez has revolutionised the ideas of Powers interested in this area.

The Suez Canal, 101 miles long and 198 feet wide (with a maximum draught, for ships, of 34 feet), leads to the Red Sea, which strategically speaking, may be considered a part of the Mediterranean. Its construction was bitterly opposed by the British Government of the day: Palmerston, Prime Minister, called the scheme of De Lesseps one of the "many bubble schemes that from time to time have been palmed upon gullible capitalists." Nevertheless, a later British Prime Minister, Disraeli, bought up as many shares as he could in the Company: 44 per



THE SUEZ CANAL



cent. of the 400,000 shares issued are in British hands.

But it is a mistake to think that the Suez Canal Company is controlled by the British. It is not. Its Board of Directors consists of twenty-one Frenchmen, ten British, two Egyptians, and one Dutchman. In 1968 the Canal may revert to the Egyptian Government, on condition that the Government pays for the improvements that have been effected.

The Canal has an international status, governed by the Convention of 1888, in which it was expressly stated that the Canal should be "free and open in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war without distinction of flag." The suggestion that it should be closed to Italy was made during the Abyssinian crisis, but it was never acted upon, and the Convention is as sacrosanct to-day as it has ever been.

It was the conquest of Abyssinia which converted the Suez Canal into what the newspapers call "news." The Italians now claim that since their shipping through the Canal exceeds that of any other single Power but Great Britain, they should have some say in the dues levied on vessels passing

through. In 1938 British shipping rose from 47·3 per cent. in 1937 to 50·4 per cent., and Italian shipping declined from 16·1 per cent. in 1937 to 13·4. German shipping was third in the 1938 list, with 9·1 per cent. It seems that the Italians would like seats on the Board of Directors given to them. On this argument, Great Britain, which has always had a far greater amount of shipping through the Canal than any other country, ought to control it, its administration and its dues.

But, the Italians object, the Canal is in fact virtually controlled by the British, through the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. They maintain that that alliance was in substantial contradiction to the 1888 Convention. They plead that Egypt's fears of Italy are illusory, and that in particular all their reinforcements in Libya, overlooking both Egypt and Tunisia, were only defensive measures.

By these protestations Egypt remains unimpressed: she has a firm ally in Great Britain and will not be moved, in howsoever dulcet a strain the faithlessness of her chief friend be chanted.

The fact is that whereas Britain's intention to defend the Suez Canal as an international

waterway is apparent to the whole world, few people are completely reassured on Italy's intentions, the Anglo-Italian Agreement notwithstanding. Possibly it is wrong to impute ill faith to Italy while that Agreement stands, ominous in many eyes though her intervention in the Spanish struggle was to several unbiased observers. That commerce should proceed freely and uninterruptedly through the Canal is as much an interest of Italy as of anyone else, but until the suspicion is finally removed that Italy may try the threat of war to obtain yet other positions or privileges in the Mediterranean, the utmost vigilance will be necessary.

The Suez Canal is indeed an artery : cut it, and more than one State might bleed to death. Possibly the first to feel the effect on its blood-stream would be Italian Abyssinia.

## CHAPTER XX

### SUMMING UP

LET us now sum up the strategic importance of British possessions in the Mediterranean and of Palestine, which may be regarded as being under British influence for at any rate as long as clouds of doubt hover over the Middle Sea.

The potentialities of Gibraltar depend almost entirely upon the attitude of Spain in the event of war in the Mediterranean. There is no need to think of its being lost to Great Britain in a war, but undoubtedly its uses as a base would be neutralised if hostile guns commanded it from the mainland of Spain and from Spanish Morocco. As an air base it is useless, and could conduct no offensive measures against its attackers, to whom, however, it would undoubtedly give a very warm reception.

There is some reason, however, to assume that Spain, in the present conflict, wishes to remain neutral. Spain wants all the energy she possesses for the process of recuperation. It is true that she has adhered to the Anti-

Comintern Pact, but that does not automatically make her an active ally of the Nazis of Berlin. Germany, moreover, has no means of coercing Spain to take up arms on her side against the Democracies, as she has, for example, in the case of Hungary. Gratitude in modern nations seldom gets the better of self-interest, and though General Franco can scarcely be expected to forget the help afforded him in his civil war by Germany and Italy, he also will not forget the basic interests of his country. Intense patriotism and the desire for external adventures are not necessarily identical.

With any dangers other than those from Spain, or from bases used with the consent of Spain, Gibraltar is well able to cope. Given the conditions predicated, the Rock is likely to emerge from a struggle scathed, yet proudly triumphant.

Of Malta, it is not possible to write with such certainty. A clash in the Mediterranean presupposes a hostile Italy, and such an Italy would most certainly do all the harm she could to Malta. For the purpose of attacking the colony she has every advantage that geographical propinquity and fast aeroplanes and surface vessels can suggest. No ships, it would seem, would

be safe at Malta under Italian attack.

But even these grim circumstances, the gravity of which there is no point in minimising, are by no means synonymous with the capture of Malta by an enemy. As has been previously pointed out, the defence of the colony has recently been perfected: Great Britain has not the slightest intention of yielding an inch of territory under whatever threat. In this inflexible determination the Maltese wholly share; they realise what is at stake, and they are wholeheartedly identifying their interests with British Imperial interests. If they cannot actively help others in the Mediterranean, they can at least help themselves, by resisting the attacker, or even the invader, and so make easier the task of British and allied forces pinned to no particular spot.

Nor should the retaliatory powers of Malta be overlooked. Her air bases would not be merely targets for enemy airmen. She knows as much about the strongholds of potential enemies as is known about her.

To many people the neglect of the strategic possibilities of Cyprus is disappointing. The advantages presented by this island are so manifest that there must be strong reasons for the fact that no use has so far

been made of them. It is true that experts differ on the precise way in which Cyprus might be utilised to help the naval and air power of the British in the Mediterranean.

That Cyprus could be converted into a base during time of war is improbable. Harbours cannot be built in a day, and although the fitting of it for aircraft could be accomplished in a much shorter space of time, an air base needs a harbour and a garrison, and it has to be confessed that there is at present no infallible sign that the island which Disraeli envisaged as a spearhead of attack upon Russia may be utilised against opponents, not from the east, but from the west.

The present importance of Cyprus does not imply, however, that it might change hands in time of war. Probably no enemy Powers would choose to waste time in attacking it, for in time of war it would be of little avail to them, and if they were to win a war they could in any case take it at the end.

But the Berlin bully is not going to win a war in the Mediterranean : the inhabitants of Cyprus, whether Greek-speaking or Turkish-speaking, need not worry how to adjust their mentality to a Nazi régime.

Finally, there is Palestine. It needs some imagination to forecast the internal situation

of Palestine in time of war. Disorder is not wholly ended. The Jews are disillusioned and very bitter over the policy recently promulgated by the Mandatory Power, and things have been done towards the British which the more responsible Jewish leaders deeply regret. Yet it is quite inconceivable that the Jews in Palestine, criticise the British as they may, would do anything to promote the chances of any Nazi victory in the world: the record of London towards them may, in their view, have been smirched, but they do not attempt to compare it with that of Berlin.

The way in which the Jews have rallied to the cause of freedom is most notable, more especially as it has been manifested so shortly after the declaration of a policy of which the Jews are inclined to see only the disadvantages and none of the advantages. The passage of time may soften the acerbity of their criticism. The state of Palestine after Nazi-ism has been defeated is not predictable.

Nor is it difficult to estimate the attitude of Palestinian Arabs now that the Nazis have wantonly attacked the Democracies. There are signs that great numbers of them are weary of the three years' strife against



the British, and would willingly give to the new policy a fair trial. But some adherents of the party of the Mufti of Jerusalem are still bitterly opposed to the Mandatory Power, and have not yet ceased to worry both the British and their fellow-Arabs who fain would collaborate with the British. Yet there is no doubt whatever that the vast mass of the Palestinian Arabs are wholeheartedly against the tyranny of Berlin.

Arab feeling as a whole, moreover—and the Palestinian Arabs are but a fragment of the Arabs of Western Asia—is emphatically on the side of the Democracies. Arabs are very shrewd appraisers of the motives of Europeans, and though they can be moved by sentimental considerations—the late T. E. Lawrence said that they could be swung on the cord of an idea—the very fact that they have come down so decisively upon the side of the Democracies is an indication that their self-interest is identified with the survival and the triumph of those Democracies.

It would seem, therefore, that the internal situation of Palestine resulting from the implementation of the new policy should not cause the Mandatory Power undue pre-occupation to the British Empire now that

it is engaged in a life and death struggle. It is true that certain Arab Nationalists used to predicate such a struggle as their opportunity. But that was in days when a world war seemed much more remote. Many things have happened since then to convince Arabs of the sort of treatment they might expect at the hands of a victorious and fanatical Germany. The Arabs in Palestine see clearly through all the lying Nazi propaganda, even if they may make, or seemed until recently to make, occasional use of it for their own ends.

To speak of loyalty in Palestine to the British cause is not out of place, even though a rebellion against the British has been in process for three years, and the Jews only shortly before the fateful day in September were threatening non-co-operation and passive resistance. Deep down, indubitably, the Palestinian Arabs pine to be friends with Great Britain. Those who know them best are aware, despite the actions of certain gangsters—and what rebellion does not allow the more undesirable elements to emerge?—that this pro-British feeling is profound.

All in all, then, it may be anticipated that in the present critical time no serious attempt

will be made to stab Great Britain in the back in Palestine. Were such an attempt made, it would of course be effectively suppressed—and in this connection the contrast may be drawn between suppressing disorder in advance of a new and juster policy and suppressing disorder after such a policy has been promulgated. The British government, in deciding upon their Palestine policy, had to take into account a multiplicity of factors, and assuredly they did not overlook the strategic implications of the Holy Land, nor the internal situation there in the conceivable time of war and its repercussions in the Near and Middle East.

All British governments have necessarily to put Imperial considerations first. There need be no shame in confessing that to Palestine this dictum has been applied. It is all to the good, indeed, that the application has been so apparent, for Palestinians can respect plain statement of motives while they have no time for tergiversation or circumlocution.

In conclusion, it is a heartening task to survey the situation in the Mediterranean as it is to-day and to contrast it with what but a few months ago many thought it might become. Not a shot has been fired, nor a

bomb dropped, on its ready land forces. The possibilities of peace in the Middle Sea have been enormously reinforced by the signing, on October 19, that is, after the main body of this book was written, of the Anglo-French-Turkish Treaty at Ankara. Reference has been made in Chapter XIV to the excellent relations subsisting between Turkey and Great Britain, and these most happily have been extended to France.

Although full allowance has been made for the Protocol in this Treaty which stipulates that Turkey is not compelled to fight Russia, the beneficial effects of the Pact are already apparent. Italy in particular has reacted in a realist way. Her neutrality has promise at the time of writing of developing into a better understanding with Turkey, and so of ending a suspicion that has long been baneful to the Mediterranean atmosphere; and she is conducting a lively campaign in the interests of preserving Balkan peace, the prospects of which have been powerfully buttressed by this Pact.

The intentions of Russia may still be a matter of some speculation, but it is hoped by every State except Germany that Turkey will be able to maintain the friendly relations which, despite the failure this last

autumn of M. Sarajoglou to reach agreement with the authorities in Moscow, she has had for nearly twenty years with the Soviet.

This Treaty is unquestionably a triumph for Western statesmanship and Turkish realism. Excellent for its immediately pacific effect, it may be seen in time to have yet other implications from the point of view of avoiding war in the Balkans and in the Near East generally. To interpret it as a purely war measure, however, would be wrong, for, viewed historically, it is the consummation of endeavours started more than a decade ago by such British Ambassadors as Sir Ronald Lindsay, Sir George Clerk, and Sir Percy Loraine. When Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen signed the Treaty in Ankara he was in effect putting the coping-stone on an edifice the foundations of which had been well and truly laid by his predecessors. If Anglo-Turkish friendship ripened slowly, it is all the more secure on that very account.

The gratification with which the Treaty was hailed in Turkey, Britain, and France, to say nothing of many other countries interested in the preservation of peace in the Near East, was matched by the gloom which it produced in Berlin. Germany immediately recognised that the "spineless diplo-

macy " of the Democracies had brought off a *coup* of the highest significance, and that her plans for the disintegration of the British and French positions in the Near East had miscarried. She had prophesied infinite woe and entanglement for the Democracies in the Mediterranean area, and the present picture of confident stability is causing her publicists to shed angry tears. For she had thought that either she or Russia or both could force almost any small Power into compliance with Nazi or Bolshevist wishes.

The Turks have been both wise and brave in so strikingly coming down on the side of justice. Their courage will long be remembered, as their interpretation of the spirit of the Democracies is a model to all nations.

To sum up, Great Britain is awake as she has never been before to the Imperial responsibilities in the Mediterranean. These she is resolved to maintain and to strengthen. Quietly, as is her wont, she has set about her task, after years of seeming forgetfulness or of a false sense of security, but very effectively for all that. All Britons, and millions of non-British, will hope and believe that her awakening has not come too late, and that, whether or not war invades the Middle Sea, her Navy will ride the Mediter-

anean, not for any monopolistic purpose, not to tyrannise over weaker peoples, but, as formerly, for the good of mankind.

